

ENTREPRENEURSHIP



GLOBAL

professional

publishing

ENTREPRENEURSHIP

From Idea To Success



GLOBAL

FARHAD FOROUTAN-ESFAHANI

professional

publishing



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

© Global Professional Publishing 2012

Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, this publication may only be reproduced, stored or transmitted, in any form or by any means, with the prior permission in writing of the publisher, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms and licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside those terms should be addressed to the publisher. The address is below:

Global Professional Publishing

Random Acres

Slip Mill Lane

Hawkhurst

Cranbrook

Kent TN18 5AD

Email: publishing@gppbooks.com

Global Professional Publishing believes that the sources of information upon which the book is based are reliable, and has made every effort to ensure the complete accuracy of the text. However, neither Global Professional Publishing, the authors nor any contributors can accept any legal responsibility whatsoever for consequences that may arise from errors or omissions or any opinion or advice given.

ISBN 978-1-906403-77-5

Printed by Berforts

For full details of Global Professional Publishing titles in Finance, Banking and Management see our website at:
www.gppbooks.com

“ That seed you carry in your pocket is in fact a red Rose whose beauty is unveiled when it blossoms. The Beauty of the red Rose is a Force struggling for freedom. It cracks open the seed, runs into the stem, and finally breaks out of the tip, by pushing the petals to open outwards, as the aftermath of a volcanic explosion; and so the Force transforms to Beauty and claims its presence in our world.

All that colourful beauty and elegance is innate within the seed, in the form of a force. A beautiful red and elegant force that Man has not yet acquired the tools to see.

All the seed needs is soil, water, and sunlight.

When you are looking at the seed you carry in your pocket, don't forget you are looking at a beautiful Rose trapped in a shell, with its petals, leaves, and stem crammed into a little tiny space.

Water it and let it become what it was destined to be.

The seed of 'making the impossible happen' is in you; you have a hidden force waiting not only to lead others, but to bring them together for a common goal. All it needs is to be exposed to others and the winner in you will force its way out.

That, my friends, is the difference between a 'pebble' and a 'seed'.”

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this book to Jenna and Fariborz, and my family, without whom none of this would have been possible.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	vi
Note to the Reader	xiii
Introduction: Are you an Entrepreneur?	1
Characteristics of an entrepreneur	2
<i>What characteristics does an entrepreneur have?</i>	2
<i>What other characteristics should an entrepreneur have?</i>	4
Prepare for the journey ahead	7
From an idea to a business	10
<i>The unique recognition</i>	10
<i>The structural vision</i>	12
<i>Creating the thought bubble</i>	16
The principles outlined in this book	19
Principle #1: Every Day is the First Day of My Business	21
Every day is the first day of your business	21
Don't allow your ritual to turn into a routine	28
The most powerful disaster is the subtle decay of a routine system	29
Make sales the driving force of change	33
The 'born-again' sales team	36
Principle #2: The Riddle that is 'Opportunity'	39
Never forget to ask 'Why me?'	39
Become a link in the chain	42
Qualification is the first preparation	48
The wave, the surfer, and the wave-maker	53
<i>The wave-maker</i>	54
<i>The wave</i>	55
<i>The surfer</i>	56

Opportunity might be hard to find but it can be simple in structure	57
Maybe I am just a hero in preparation, drinking from the ‘Well of Possibilities’	60
Principle #3: Passion Might be the Drive but Structure is the Key	69
Business commanders for a business battle	73
<i>Business Commanders</i>	74
<i>Propaganda Commander – Communicate your efforts</i>	75
<i>Intelligence Commander – Know the enemy</i>	78
<i>Product Evaluation Commander – Conquer people for people</i>	80
<i>Finance Commander – Funding the campaign</i>	85
<i>Strategy Commander – Bringing it all together</i>	89
Principle #4: The Most Difficult Fight of Your Life is not to Build an Empire but to Re-build it	93
What happens when we lose the ‘certainty assumption’?	95
Success is not something we can achieve in the future, but something we must achieve every day	101
Eradicate the emotional stress	106
Perfect conditions are not a ‘must’ but an ‘added bonus’	108
Embrace the four seasons of your business	110
You can lose faith in everything else but not in yourself	113
Supplement #1: An Experiment in Relation to ‘Worrying’	115
Principle #5: Knowledge is Not a Secret but a Conclusion – ‘The Legend of the Book of Answers’	121
The legend of the ‘Book of Answers’ – The weight of fear	124

Taking the international step	130
<i>So how do you make the initial selection?</i>	134
<i>How to choose the final candidates</i>	137
<i>Product popularity and market size</i>	138
The Mouse of Amsterdam	141

Principle #6: 'Business Kung Fu' – Never Go to Work without It

	145
The art of negotiation	147
Use 'psychological warfare' to crush your competitor's confidence	153
<i>How to crush your competitor's confidence</i>	154
Customers won on price are lost on price	158
The uncomfortable evolution of man	160

Principle #7: Use Your Crises as a Chance to Demonstrate Your Efficiency

	169
When facing service issues be 'efficient' but be 'proud'	172
Shift the focus from what you don't have to what you have	176
We get the chance to show our efficiency only in times of trouble	183

Supplement #2: Greatness must be Measured in Evolutionary Terms and not Just by Winning

	185
Winning is just an outcome but 'greatness' is in the details of the journey	187
<i>The significance of 'time and 'need in the story of evolution</i>	189
<i>Do chance or luck play a role in evolution?</i>	191
<i>Man's purpose and duty in the story of evolution</i>	193
To go up a single step is a far greater achievement than being born at the top of the stairs	194
The nature of Man's evolutionary journey	197

Principle #8: Having a Good Team is as Important as Having a Good Idea	201
Don't employ people to do as you say, employ them to deliver what you want	203
<i>The destination</i>	204
<i>The path</i>	204
Having the talent for talent spotting	207
The importance of delegation	211
A family business doesn't have to be about the family's business	213
View your suppliers as though they were your team members	215
 Principle #9: If you were not Born a Sea, Why not Bring Together the Lonely Rivers?	 219
A friend of your customer is a friend of yours	222
Choose your partners carefully as their actions will reflect on yours	224
Joint ventures can expand your business overnight	227
<i>Delivering a one-stop-shop solution</i>	227
<i>Expanding the customer base</i>	228
 Principle #10: Never Forget the Power of Novelty – The 'Gillette Factor'	 231
Your novelty factor's lifecycle will affect the duration of your business plan	232
Always remember the 'Gillette Factor'	234
<i>The Gillette Factor</i>	234
Constantly breathe new life into your company – never let it stand still	237
 Principle #11: In Order to Make your Dreams Come True You Must First Wake up	 239
You need to believe that where you are now is the best possible place for achieving your dreams	241

The best time to pursue a dream is when you know its true value	247
Instead of having a £1m dream why not have a million £1 dreams?	252
Never live in denial and always remind yourself of your issues	254
Supplement #3: The Two Pillars of Success	259
Identifying the principles – The difference between knowledge and awareness	259
Having absolute faith in your principles – Indiana Jones and the Bridge of Faith	263

GLOBAL
professional
publishing



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

NOTE TO THE READER

Is there a set of principles that we can follow to ensure the success of our business irrespective of our chosen industry and the era we live in?

When the whole world comes crushing down on us, and we are not able to find a way out of our business problems, we go looking for guidance and support to someone or some book that can tell us what to do and how to do it; a set of business principles that would apply to every business type and at all times.

Outlining these principles is the main objective of all 'how to' business books, but where the majority of such books fail is in being unable to engage the reader so that they can relate to the principles and identify with the author. The reason is that, although such business books are written by already-made millionaires and respected tycoons, we do actually tend to associate a major proportion of their success with what it was that they did and when they did it – basically being in the right industry at the right time – and it is because of this that the reader cannot fully relate to the author and their principles.

It seems as if our industry of choice has a lot to do with success and as soon as we believe this myth we will find it impossible to change our financial destiny because we believe we started on the wrong path and now it's too late to undo such a major mistake. This is specially amplified in today's market where most major success stories are to do with new age technologies and young minds, individuals who grew up with these industries, who are now able to understand them on a different level from someone like me whose maximum use of a mobile phone is sending an SMS.

All this keeps bringing us back to the opening question: is there anything we can do to change our financial destiny, without changing our industries, and in such difficult times?

I believe the answer is without a shadow of a doubt an absolute YES. I think there are two types of success story in the business world: ‘those who sell a perfect product’ and ‘those who perfectly sell a product’ and the latter is what you will have to become if you find yourself unable to get into the right industry. So you too can become successful in whatever it is that you are doing.

The aim of this book is to introduce you, and other budding entrepreneurs, to a set of business principles which can be followed regardless of your line of business and when you start; principles that will give you that initial life-changing financial jump which will enable you to properly pursue your business dreams; principles that will turn you into a business superperson, better positioned than your competition, which of course is the key ingredient for success.

It doesn't always take a clichéd-type business man/woman to pull off such an entrepreneurial coup.

Most people associate a certain type of person with the entrepreneur; someone, perhaps, whose natural flair for ‘money making’ would have had him marked, from an early age, as destined to end up in the world of business.

Well, not in all cases.

At my first proper job, at the age of 24, for my first ever call to a customer, I had a note on my computer screen to call a MR MICHAEL ASAP. So I picked up the phone, dialled the number and asked if I could speak to a Mr Asap. The guy who answered the phone said there was no one there with that name but I insisted, “I have a note, on my screen, from our customer service team to call a Mr Michael Asap as he has been waiting for a call back from us for nearly two weeks now”. I will never forget it, because as soon as I said this there was a pause and silence, and then, in a very angry but controlled manner the guy said “Surely you have a note to call Mr Michael ASAP as in ‘as soon as possible’ - and that would be me.”

And that was it. I just froze and couldn't breathe, and all I managed to do was to reach out for my colleague's chair in the next cubicle, pull him towards me, take off his headset and replace it with mine, and just mime 'help me'.

"Mr Asap" became my nickname for that six months uncomfortable period which it took me to find my feet.

I was full of surprises in those early days and if the above wasn't enough, one day, shortly after that episode, I reported a fault to our IT team regarding our team's fax machine which went down in the books. Earlier that day I had repeatedly tried to fax a document to a customer and was convinced it hadn't been done, so I reported the fault to our IT help desk. When asked what the fault was, I explained "the document which I am trying to fax keeps coming out of the other end of the fax machine." "Where is it supposed to go?" the IT guy asked me. "Well, through the fax line" I replied. And then, of course, I actually heard my own voice and what I was saying, and realised that this lovely technology isn't 'paper teleportation' but in fact a digital transmission device.

And now every time I am training a new person in my company who tells me they don't think they can do the job as well as me, I just shuck them by telling them the Mr Asap story. And if anyone in my team thinks they don't have the necessary technical background to get to grips with our network and infrastructure, I just tell them the fax machine incident.

I tell them these stories because I want them, and you, to understand that it doesn't always take that clichéd business man/woman type to turn an idea into a business. It doesn't matter where you are and what you are doing right now, you can always start to turn your life around just as long as you follow a few key principles which I am going to give you.

Although I haven't reached my ultimate business goals, I have managed to build a Europe-wide business from scratch. And I guess I am different and so is my approach, both in life and in business.

NOTE TO THE READER

I often talk to myself and more frequently forget things, but I do have a system that has taken my business, so far, halfway across the world, and I would like to share that system with you in the pages to come.

Happy reading



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

ARE YOU AN ENTREPRENEUR?

en·tre·pre·neur = a person who organizes and manages any enterprise, esp. a business, usually with considerable initiative and risk.

Everything that starts must have a beginning and yours is right here, when you ask yourself, “Am I an entrepreneur?”

All business stories begin with an entrepreneurial act, where one or more people come together to turn an idea into a tangible product or service so that they can financially benefit from their creation.

In the light of many inspiring stories about world-famous entrepreneurs we often wonder whether we would be able to do the same and change our financial status, with the added bonus of being able to do something we are truly passionate about and wake up every day looking forward to taking one step closer to finishing our masterpiece.

And we ask ourselves whether we have got what it takes to follow in the footsteps of our heroes.

It could be because you are tired of doing the same old routine day after day or maybe you are just tired of making money for someone else. Have you ever walked out of your workplace praying you would never have to come back to that job? Have you ever felt that your career is going nowhere wishing you could change your life tomorrow? Maybe you work for a boss who thinks he knows it all – but you know you can do it better. Maybe you even work for me. Well I hope not. I mean if you do I hope this is

not how you feel, but either way the aim of this book is to help you make the right business decision and turn your life around.

But before you decide to make that life-changing decision you need to first ensure this is what you want to do and, more importantly, this is something you are able to do.

This is when you have to ask yourself “Am I an entrepreneur?, Do I have what it takes to follow in the footsteps of those great individuals whom I admire?”

Well, in order to answer these questions you will first need to ask “What are the typical characteristics of an entrepreneur?” and secondly “Are these characteristics all that you will need in order to become a successful business person?”

The characteristics of an entrepreneur

So, first the characteristics. Below are two lists of personality traits common amongst all entrepreneurs. Have a look at them and see if you can identify with any of them. You will need to identify with traits from both lists and, depending on how many of these traits you can identify with, you will be able to tell how close or how far you are from becoming an entrepreneur. However if you find yourself unable to identify with any of them, from either list, then it means this book is not for you and you should continue working for someone else. I am only telling you this because I don't want you to learn this truth the hard and expensive way.

What characteristics does an entrepreneur have?

- **Always positive and upbeat** = Someone who is an optimist and sees solutions rather than problems. Someone who seems to have an annoyingly endless source of positive energy and is always able to see an opportunity even while facing extremely difficult challenges. Someone who always thinks of possibilities rather than impossibilities. You will

need this if you are going to enter the competitive world of business.

- **Creative** = I don't mean artistic creative, like a painter or a musician, but someone who enjoys creating something out of nothing and is able to bring together a novel way of offering a service, either a new service or a new way of offering an existing service – or of launching a new product, or an old product in a new way. Someone who is able to see creative solutions that others are oblivious to.
- **Persuasive** = Someone who is able to successfully communicate their intentions with others and draw them into their world and get them to agree. Someone who has a lot of conviction and is able to make others see the world from their point of view and convince them to be a part of this new world.
- **Risk Taker** = Someone not scared of trying new things and entering new territories. Someone who is able to step out of their comfort zone and try something they have never directly experienced before. This characteristic is amplified when a person decides to tackle an unknown project and invest all their savings in it.
- **Competitive** = Someone who always likes to be the winner. Someone who takes pride in being better than others and defines him/herself as being the best of the bunch.
- **Invincible** = Someone who thinks they can do anything and nothing can ever go wrong and that they will never be defeated. Someone very self-assured and confident who believes they can fight their way out of any kind of trouble.
- **Never Giving Up** = Someone who doesn't stop at the first hurdle but keeps on going until the goal is achieved. Someone tenacious and not easily put off even in the face of the most devastating of setbacks.

- **Able to know when to stop** = This is key because sometimes the ‘invincible’ and ‘never giving up’ characteristics will have us chase a dream that is never going to happen. You need to know when to stop or when to pull back. So someone who is able to walk away from a deal even if they have been working on it for a long time.
- **Motivated by financial success** = Someone who likes to have money. Someone who enjoys the spoils of a financially successful career. Someone who identifies personal/business success with having money.

What other characteristics should an entrepreneur have?

- **Considerate of other people** = Someone who knows it’s not all about ‘me, me, and me’ and who can genuinely consider the benefits and well being of those they work with – customers, suppliers and their own team members.
 - **Team player** = Someone who is able to let others lead when it’s in the best interest of the team and the business. Someone who can take directions as well as give them. Someone who is able to hire people who are better than they are.
 - **Having ethical and moral values** = Someone able to draw a clear line between ‘financial success’ and ‘doing anything for the sake of money’. Someone who is not willing to participate in just any activity in order to make a profit.
 - **Responsible** = A lot of people will depend on you and your actions, internally and externally, so you need to have a sense of responsibility towards them. You need to make sure you take this responsibility into account throughout the course of your business life, even when the time comes that you decide you want to walk away from a deal or a project and perhaps

the business itself. You can't leave it to others to pick up the pieces. Your responsibilities don't end just because you have decided you no longer want to participate. You need to consider other people's time and investment and make sure they are not left short changed due to your sudden departure.

WHY TWO LISTS?

Well there is a reason. The first list is what usually gives birth to an entrepreneurial act – individuals with such characteristics often start their own businesses. The second list, however, will ensure the efforts of those entrepreneurs do actually turn into success, and it usually comes later on in the business, once we have experienced the vital difference between theory and practice, the difference between how we thought our business plan would work out and how it actually did. This difference will remind us of a few additional key ingredients which we need to add to the recipe, hence the second list. Taking an idea and turning it into a fully functional/successful business would require both lists in full.

The first list is all about you. You are the star of the show. It's all about what you can do and how you will benefit from it. The second, however, is about others, others without whom your business could not exist – suppliers, customers, and employees.

Separately these lists lack balance and your efforts will push in one direction only, and this direction on its own cannot make your dreams come true.

If the business is all about you then you will neglect others and will stop at nothing to get what best suits you, hurting and alienating anyone in your path. Maybe that's OK. After all we are not here to make friends, it's business not personal, right? Wrong; business is

a team effort and you are going to need the absolute commitment and loyalty of all parties involved, something you will fail to obtain if you prove to be looking out only for yourself.

I am not suggesting you should work only to benefit others. No, that would mean applying the second list only. If, however, you keep both lists in mind you will be able to strike a balance which will include everyone, both you **and** everyone else involved, and this will lay a perfect foundation for your ongoing business plans.

Now the second question. Are these characteristics all that you will need in order to become a successful business person?

No, because having the right 'personality traits' is only the foundation on which you can start a business. In order for you to maintain and grow your business you will need something over and above 'personality traits'. You will now need a key number of principles which you must apply in order to ensure the success of your efforts.

The aim of my book is to highlight the nature of this business challenge which you are about to take as well as introducing you to a set of principles which you must apply to ensure the success of your business. During the course of this book you will be able to draw links between these principles and the characteristics I list above.

But can anyone with these characteristics really become a successful entrepreneur? Is it that simple and straightforward? Can you turn your life around by reading a book like this and following a few principles? Yes, you can, but it will be neither simple nor straightforward. You will have to fully embrace the role; you will have to commit to it 100%. Being an entrepreneur is not about wearing a mask, and pretending to be someone else, nor is it about wearing a suit and trying to look the part. It's about hard work and absolute dedication, and it's about living and breathing the principles.

The above two lists are only the initial prerequisites for being an entrepreneur and now you are going to have to prepare for the journey that awaits you.

Prepare for the journey ahead

Every boxer says “Give me a shot at the title and I will sleep in the gym” meaning they will spend every waking moment training for the fight. As if that is some great sacrifice we must admire them for! If you have been given a shot at the title it means you have a definite chance at success. Not so much of a sacrifice after all. The real challenge is to sleep in the gym not knowing when and if at all you are going to get your shot. The challenge is to do it all by believing only in yourself and having faith in your ability. Sacrifice in the face of uncertainty is of the highest degree, and that is the nature of the journey you are about to take.

Turning an idea into a business empire is an intense, painful, and exhausting journey which you must prepare for, but at the same time it is also extremely rewarding, because you can achieve your financial goals. You can become the master of your financial destiny and use this financial security to achieve even higher purposes.

As you go through this journey day by day you will be faced with physical and mental challenges beyond any you have experienced before. It will not be easy because it will mean total commitment, and by that I mean sacrificing everything else and starting to live and breathe your business – you will become your business. Whatever the direction of your life might have been before, you are now going to have to park it to one side and think of nothing but your business, so that you too may stand a chance of realising your dreams; and always in the face of uncertainty.

The business becomes your baby, from the idea stage (conception) to getting started (birth), and then growing it into a healthy child which can go from strength to strength. This baby is yours; no one in the world can or will love it as much as you (and your partners), and no one else will be prepared to stay awake when it needs love and care.

The process is painful because it is slow and above all it's uncertain. There will be times when you will realise that everything you have ever worked for could come to a sudden end due to forces out of your control. Just like a young tree, your business too is vulnerable to the mildest of winds, simply because you haven't got your roots firmly in the ground yet. And the pressure will get to you.

This truly is an emotional roller coaster, from one extreme to another, like the time, which I am never allowed to forget, when everything was going wrong and I couldn't find a pen and I just lost it. I shouted at the top of my lungs "There is no pen in the office, IT'S OVER", mumbling away how a business without a pen was doomed to fail, and then out of nowhere a hand appeared in front of my face with a pen and my business partner, in a soft and quiet voice, said "Here is a pen, you see, it's all good". But, when facing highly likely disasters, we can easily be forgiven such emotional outbursts.

Yes, it is hard to count the pennies in your pocket, that may not even add up to paying a single utility invoice, and still believe that one day all this will be over and you too will have the financial security which only a few benefit from. When you are at your lowest ebb, when your business empire is nothing more than you and your thoughts, and you are left all alone to face overdue invoices from your suppliers and late deliveries to your customers, you ask yourself "Is this how my life was supposed to turn out?", "Am I really going to get out of this mess one day"? When you are at your lowest and stay awake all night thinking that you can't face another day of just surviving, when you know that your business dream is nothing more than you and the suit you bought a few years ago – this is when you realise the reality of the challenge you have chosen. You realise how far you are from where you want to be, and the worst part of all is that even so you still may not get there because all the odds are against you.

You are fighting the world with an army of the chosen few.

During this phase there will be times when you will want to hide yourself away from the rest of the world and face the heavens and cry “why should someone as intelligent, driven and ethical as me not be able to get his chance?” I am not talking about a few teardrops, I am talking about a painful cry, a pain which I remember having all over my face. The pain was so intense it made me aware of my facial features. I mean how often do we physically feel our eyebrows, jaws or cheekbones? Usually we don’t even know they are there. This pain was so intense that it would make me aware of my facial features as though the pain was crushing against them. This is a pain that would start from my stomach and burn its way up to my head, and finally come out of my eyes as tears. I would silently scream “why can’t I get my chance?”, “I deserve to be more successful and wealthier than half the other rich individuals out there who were only born in the right place at the right time” and so on and so forth.

Unfortunately this is not a short phase and be assured you will go through months if not years of this on and off painful frustration. Therefore if you are about to start your business idea from nothing then be assured that these dark nights and days await you, or if you have already started your business then you will be able to relate to what I have written as you too are going or have gone through it.

However success comes in small steps and when it finally does start to arrive you will feel as if you are the master of the universe. You will see how what was once just an idea in your head is slowly but surely turning into a tangible success. Although it is hard and painful, you will be doing something you absolutely love and there is no feeling greater than the feeling of creativity as this is the closet we will ever come to knowing God. The experience

of this journey will change you forever and will prepare you for everything else that life has to throw at you. We appreciate the spoils of our success only because we have truly earned them.

I hope you keep at it because there is no feeling more gratifying than making something out of nothing.

From an idea to a business

I once heard someone say “if you say the same thing in many different ways you will be able to discover previously ignored information” so here I would like to offer you a fresh look at what actually happens when a business is created and the stages it goes through before an idea can become a fully functioning business.

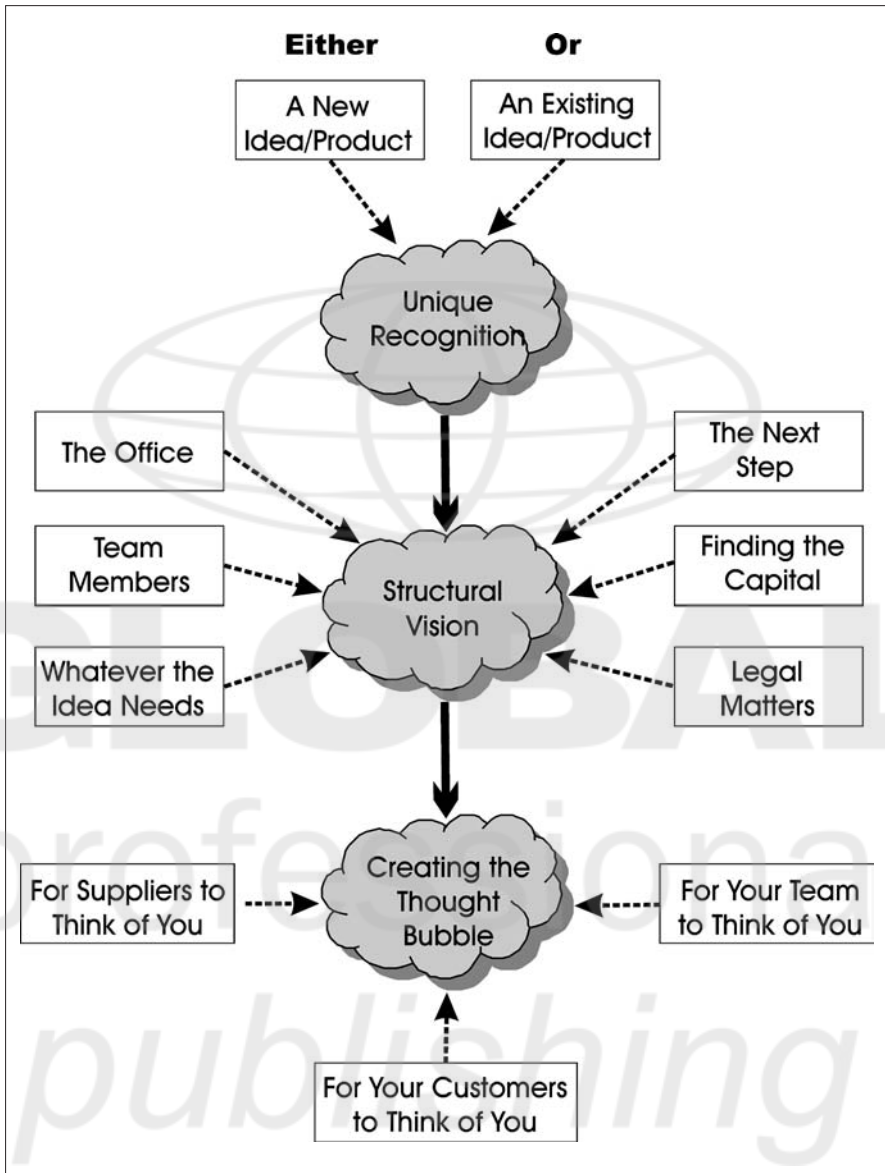
The diagram opposite illustrates what happens when a business is created.

The unique recognition

The word **entrepreneur** is an overused word in today’s media. I am not even entirely sure if I qualify as one. However what I do know is that in my case it all started with a single thought, a single vision and a moment of clarity, where I saw a beginning, a middle and an end, all in one single moment of ‘recognition’.

The world of business is an essential part of our everyday lives and life itself is a complicated and, most of all, an unpredictable journey. However, if you look closely you will find order within this chaos.

Business is a combination of a set of relationships formed between the service provider, the supplier, and the customer, but it all starts with a ‘need’ or a ‘want’ or should I say it all starts with the ‘moment of recognition’, recognising a unique need or want – this will be your ‘Unique Recognition’.



All successful businesses, in one way or another, satisfy a need or a want. How much profit they stand to make has to do with how common (in popular demand) this need or want is, how saturated the market has become, and how effectively the business is run. In many cases they will have a 'unique recognition'. It will be unique

either because they have recognised a new idea (something others haven't thought of or simply hadn't got around to addressing) or because they have recognised a new way of addressing an existing idea. Business doesn't always have to be about offering a new product; you can still make your dreams come true by doing what others do but by doing it much better.

OK, now you have an idea, but this initial moment of Recognition is the start and not all that entrepreneurship is about; there have been many occasions when I have been amongst friends and colleagues, when at least one of us mentioned a 'unique recognition'. But being an entrepreneur is about something more intense

Taking an idea, the initial recognition, and turning it into a successful business is nothing short of a journey. The journey of forming and maintaining the necessary relationships between the different parties mentioned above: the service provider, the suppliers, and the customers.

The structural vision

In order to turn an idea into a business you will need to create a structure, and knowing the details of this structure is what we will call 'structural vision'.

Every business is a **service provider** in that it offers some kind of service to its targeted audience and needs customers to sell to and suppliers to buy from. However, before you can target your customers and select your suppliers and start forming these relationships, you need to decide who you are and how you will conduct your business.

Choose any established business of your choice and consider the following: they have a name, they have a slogan, great marketing and advertising campaigns, an office or premises to work out of, different divisions performing allocated tasks, key positions leading the teams, targeting different customer types, addressing at least one need or want and of course, ethics. All or

some of these are attributes that change through the course of a business's life depending on a multitude of internal and external conditions.

But the key thing to grasp and remember is that every business requires a certain structure for coping with whatever business goals lie ahead. At the start the goals may just be to launch the business and create enough profit to see it through to the next phase. Maybe all you need to get going is an office, sorting out the IT, and finding two sales people, and so on. Soon, though, you will find these goals have been achieved and now you need to expand.

A successful business must be able to expand when necessary or downsize as needed. This is determined by ever-changing market forces, which means your immediate or even long-term goals can change. Every successful business has a great infrastructure with different divisions performing their allocated tasks, all brought together to achieve a common goal. This is the foundation.

As these goals change so does the structure of the business. It evolves and adapts if you like. Some of these changes will impose unfamiliar challenges that require the business to acquire the knowledge needed to overcome these new challenges. Whether it's expansion or downsizing, every business needs to implement the new structure that best suits its needs.

That is what I call '*having the Structural Vision*', being able to visualise the structure needed for taking a 'unique recognition' and turning it into an operational business.

In my opinion an entrepreneur is an individual who can both visualise the structure and visualise the journey which he/she needs to go through during the coming challenges. *The entrepreneur not only has a unique recognition – spotting the want or need – but has structural vision whereby they can actually visualise every single step needed at every stage of the business's life.*

Entrepreneurs are said to be risk takers but they take calculated risks.

So what makes their risks calculated? Of course they have the necessary knowledge but many people who have the same knowledge are not brave enough to take the same risks. This is because the entrepreneur can visualise what they need to do next, not only seeing what needs to be done next, but seeing how it can be done. This is why, for them, there is less unknown in this equation, making them *calculated* risk takers.

This is important. In my opinion it is the key attribute of all entrepreneurs. If they need to get an office they will visualise the steps: their meeting with the estate agent, the negotiations, the IT, the phone lines, where every desk will go, etc. If the entrepreneur is thinking of employing the sales people they will need, they will have mental images of how they will conduct the interview and even how they will train the staff.

Let me be clear on this. I am not suggesting that the entrepreneur is able to visualise the actual office or estate agent or the new employees whom they have never seen.

But I am saying that the word 'office' is not an enigma to the entrepreneur, or the word 'employee', etc. Entrepreneurs are comfortably able to simplify the task and visualise that the office is probably in a service-managed office block, they know all they have to do is talk to a few different agents and eventually they will find the space they need. They will negotiate and soon get their key to the place, then call in an IT person to kit it out with the necessary technology and then get the phone lines in and ready for business. When thinking of employees they know the type they are looking for and what they want from them in terms of performance and duties. When they think of training them they probably have it all worked out, as they know what they want their new employees to learn, etc.

Therefore they have the ability to visualise the necessary structure their business needs at that particular moment in time.

And as times change and they need more employees, marketing, different divisions and perhaps more offices, once again they are able to visualise those steps too.

Having the ability to visualise means that they have mentally gone through the journey once and this makes it easier for them to actually commit themselves to these changes and tasks as they arise.

The closest example I can give you is that of solving a maze. I am sure you have seen puzzles where there is an entry point and an exit point and then a whole bunch of spaghetti-shaped roads between these two points where you have to link the entry to the exit by choosing the correct path and not going through dead ends. Now imagine having the ability to look at this chaotic puzzle and somehow the correct path is revealed to you. Now, please note, I am not suggesting that an entrepreneur is an individual who literally has the gift of solving these types of puzzles by just looking at them. What I am trying to bring to your attention is that in the world of everyday business, where we are faced with various different challenges and goals, the entrepreneur is able to visualise the correct steps and quickly identify the path which will take them from where they actually are to where they need to be. The entrepreneur, unlike other individuals, will not be overwhelmed by the complexity of the task. They won't be discouraged from taking on the unknown, because they have been able to visualise the path needed to overcome the challenges they will face at each step of the way.

It's that great question of 'where do you start' which is what I am talking about. It is this great question of the unknown which holds back millions of people from trying. The time it takes for

most people to look at a task and say ‘where do I start’ is the same amount of time it takes the entrepreneur to have the vision of the steps needed to start and finish the task.

The other most amazing part of turning an idea into a business is the immediate impact it will have on the world and other people’s lives, and this brings us to the final phase of the business journey.

Creating the thought bubble

The ultimate challenge of any entrepreneur is to ensure that the product of their creativity becomes a significant part of at least one other person’s life besides their own, and the more successful the entrepreneur the more widely spread is the effect of their creation. Making others think of our business is what I call ‘creating the thought bubble’.

A person’s actions are influenced by their thoughts. In every moment of every day of our life we have at least one thought which is dictating our actions.

What a shame we are not able to see a person’s thoughts when we look at them; we see their gaze, we hear their words and see their actions but we are not able to see their thoughts. Let’s just imagine we could for the sake of this discussion. Let’s all imagine we were able to see someone else’s thoughts. We would see a man on a cold frosty day, sitting in a coffee shop, with his legs crossed, one hand in his long black coat pocket and the other hand holding a steaming but frothy latte, staring right out of the window, at the golden fiery leaves of an autumn tree, oblivious to others around him.

Imagine we could look at this man and see his thoughts – I mean actually see his thoughts. We would be able to see different thought bubbles around his head, some bigger than others. One by

one as he thinks about different things the bubbles would replace one another. As a thought progresses through his mind we would be able to see the previous bubble fade away and then a new one beginning to emerge, different thought bubbles battling it out as if he can't really decide which one to focus on.

Now imagine we were able to see the thought bubbles of every person walking in the street, driving in their cars, sitting in a coffee shop or in a bar with their friends – the thought bubbles which tell the tale of a person's destiny.

Now let's imagine we had a secret device with a pause button which we could press and the world would, all of a sudden, stop and stay still. Grant me one more and let's assume that another secret device called the 'thought inserter' came into our possession. How amazing it would be if, while the world remained still, we could approach a person, pick up a new thought and place it in his thought bank and press 'play'. That person's life would from that moment on take an unexpected turn, a direction which prior to that moment would never have been taken. A new thought that could even lead to a new life depending on how big a role this thought might play in that person's life. Previously he had his own thoughts and his own plans based on those thoughts. Now he has a new thought inserted in his thought bank.

This is what 'entrepreneurship' is all about.

Creating your business is like adding a new thought bubble to someone's thought bank and pressing 'play'.

The world without your creation is following its destiny, and suddenly in one moment you are able to press the 'pause' button and introduce your additional wheel to the millions of other wheels that keep it turning. All of a sudden a new thinking topic is born, customers who have been using other services are now

going to be introduced to a new and improved option which they can discuss with their friends. Kayhan International newspaper, with whom we had decided to advertise, had to create a blank space in order to print our advert, where before there had been part of a news column. So either the news column needed to be removed or more pages had to be added. So when Mr Ferdosy opens the Kayhan newspaper and sees the advert for 'Hello Home' the thought bubble has been inserted. He can either turn the page and never look back or he might be intrigued and call our customer service. He might decide to join us or he might not. As Mr Ferdosy's involvement with Hello Home expands so will the spread of my company's thought bubble.

Let us not forget the impact you will have on our future team members. Again it's as if they were busy living their lives when suddenly this new addition to their world crosses their path and changes their direction, their lives which up until your moment of 'recognition' were destined for completely different journeys.

The world is now turning with an extra wheel. Sometimes this wheel become so significant that without it our world would come crashing to a stop, and at other times it's so insignificant that no one would remember it for even a day if it were to stop.

A business's challenge is to ever expand its thought bubble in the world. The bigger the business has become means the more thought bubbles have been added to the thought banks of tens, hundreds and even millions of people, customers, suppliers, employees, shareholders and so on. Creating your company is creating a new thought that, prior to that moment, did not exist. In the instant when you decided to create your business, a new thought was generated which could soon become a thought in the thought banks of many, many people.

I hope I have explained this properly but it was important that you absolutely share the most essential part of the business with me, creation and creativity.

This is the difference between a person who has an idea and an entrepreneur. The latter is able to recognise a 'need' or a 'want', create a system in order to offer a solution addressing this 'need' or 'want' and create awareness within the marketplace by inserting the thought of that solution in as many minds as possible.

The principles outlined in this book

Well, the above is a summary of how a business is created. To maintain and grow this business, however, you need a set of principles and this book will introduce you to them.

Nothing ever works out as planned and in business probably more than in any other part of life.

Reality shows its full impact. The journey of taking an idea and turning it into a fully functioning business will bring you face to face with many challenges and personal demons, for which you cannot just rely on instinct and personality traits. Regardless of which industry you are in, or what type of business you are planning to start, there will always be unpredictable events that could pose a problem or create an opportunity for you, and it is here that you need to have a number of vital key principles to help you get the most out of these situations, as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Principles are as important for dealing with a crisis as they are for making the most of a sudden opportunity. Even on those occasions when everything just falls into place and we find ourselves in the right place at the right time, with market forces working in our favour where we are part of a growing industry/

economy, it is still important to follow these principles so we can get the best possible advantage of such short and rare moments of opportunity.

For me these principles have become a shining light guiding me through some of my darkest and loneliest moments.

I first started outlining my principles in the form of a journal, when most nights I would sit down and write down the challenges we were facing as a business at that particular time as well as reminding myself of the principles I would need to follow in order to overcome them. All of these principles were written during the three year period when I decided to take our business into Europe and expand our territory. For the purposes of this book I decided to present you with just the principles and leave the initial journal format for a possible future publication. These principles therefore were identified and utilised during the kind of real time challenges that most entrepreneurs have to face and go through, challenges as common in your business as in any other start-up.

I hope you enjoy reading them and benefit from them. If you have any comments or feedback please email me on author@entrepreneurship-book.com or via twitter [@FarhadForoutan](https://twitter.com/FarhadForoutan). I would love to hear from you.

EVERY DAY IS THE FIRST DAY OF MY BUSINESS

The hardest part of being an entrepreneur is not the 'coming up with new and novel ideas' but actually being able to maintain your initial momentum and belief all the way through the course of your business, perhaps after months and years of not achieving your goals, as though every day was the first day of your business. This is the difference between 'entrepreneurs' and 'wannabes'.

And this brings us to the opening principle of the book.

Every day is the first day of your business

The difference between being an entrepreneur and having a regular nine-to-five job is that entrepreneurs get up every day with the aim of taking one step closer to achieving their dreams. They go through their individual and unique rituals as they prepare to overcome whatever hurdles might lie between them and their goals. Yes, every day is a chance to take one step closer to achieving something great; whereas with a nine-to-five job all we are concerned with is the predetermined tasks of a daily routine. You must never allow your business to turn into a job because that means a routine and with a routine comes decay, a very slow but

subtle decay and the worst type of disaster for any entrepreneur is the subtle decay of a routine system.

You need to wake up every day treating your business as if it's the first day you launched it. Just pause for one moment and reminisce about the days when your business was an idea full of hopes and dreams. You embarked on this journey with an unstoppable force, believing that this was how you would change your life and the lives of those you cared about the most, knowing every step taken was bringing you that little bit closer to achieving something great.

In the early days, by which I mean the initial months and first couple of years, the business is a 'project' and actually a 'business plan' with an end goal. All of our efforts are targeted at completing this plan and bringing the project to a satisfactory end.

In doing so, we will face all manner of challenges with an unbelievable drive and determination, because to us these problems and challenges are nothing more than what stand between us and the end goal, and overcoming them is all that we have got to do. We are the problem solvers, solving problems that stand between us and the end reward.

The ultimate goal is all that we think about, every day and every minute of every hour.

Our efforts and style of working have a certain speed to them, an agility admired by others who can only sit and watch while we fight our way to success. Nothing can slow us down and no problem is too difficult to resolve, as we have brought with us the gift of multitasking, coupled with tenacity and faith.

Yes, tenacity and faith in what represents our dreams. When we go to sleep we think of tomorrow as a world of possibilities, a world in which it is possible for us to achieve our goals. Our initial business plan and aim is something that belongs very much to the

world of things we believe we can achieve. This is the feeling I was talking about, the feeling we have when we know we are about to do something pretty special, the feeling, in fact, we have on the first day we launch our business.

However, although we are convinced our business plan will work, it is nevertheless a theory we need to put to the test, and here is where the foundations of the future empire could begin to weaken.

In order to turn our idea into a successful business we are going to need a plan, and so we begin to execute our business plan, the strategy that will take us to our dream. We all begin our business journey with a specific plan in mind, and we are excited about this plan and give our 100% commitment to its execution, as we associate the possibility/validity of the overall business idea to the success of this specific plan, the details of how we are going to introduce the world to our creation. For example, finding the right location for our business or creating a powerful marketing campaign to attract the targeted audience or other selling points which will help us win customers from our competitors. Each one of these steps can determine the outcome of the business.

But as soon as the theory is put to the test we will realise how far from reality our version of these steps has been. Only an idea can be perfect because as soon as we begin to implement it we will begin to see our dependence on others on whose cooperation we have to depend, and where there is dependence there certainly will be a high probability of imperfection.

None of our grand plans seem to work out and the impact of our efforts doesn't come even close to what we expected. The marketing campaign does not attract the right customers, our suppliers fail to offer us the level of quality we were expecting and so on.

Slowly as time passes on the journey our saddlebags get filled with failures, a hint of doubt and negativity covers the initial

glow and our faith becomes a little dimmed. But as soon as we lose our faith we stop being an entrepreneur and before we know it the once hailed 'business plan' or 'project' will have turned into just another job – a job aimed just at paying the bills and making ends meet, no longer a path to achieving our dream.

Yes, before you know it you have got yourself a nine-to-five job like any other. The only difference is you don't have to answer to a boss and in a way you are your own boss. Congratulations after all the hardship and effort you have managed to get yourself a job. But if it was a job you were after then why did you even bother leaving your previous secure job? Why did you not look for a job in a bigger and more reputable firm? All this so you don't have to answer to anyone?

This is the start of failure, because what has become just a job to you is now the business plan of another hungry entrepreneur, and this is the first day of his/her business and you are just another hurdle he will overcome, and, rest assured, overcome you he will.

Never treat your business like a job, as a routine, a trap many fall into. Always treat your business like a project which means always give yourself new challenges, new deadlines and a structured business plan to deliver the project.

If your business has turned into a job it's because you have mistakenly associated the success of the business plan with the validity and credibility of the initial business idea. However, just because your marketing campaign did not pull in the crowds it doesn't actually mean your business idea was flawed; it could have been the content and timing of the campaign. You need to learn from it and try again.

I say it again – never treat your business like a job. At least one person in any business needs to treat the business like a business plan or a project. That person is you and, if you are lucky, your business partners and shareholders too.

You need to remind yourself of this business principle every day so that even during your darkest hours you don't forget the reason you have embarked upon this journey.

I'd like to share a personal story of how I learned the value of this lesson.

I first realised the importance of this at the age of 14, when I decided to leave Iran, my home country, and travelled to Turkey in the hope of crossing into the UK where my older sister and brother were living. Many Iranians chose that route at that time as Turkey was the only country that did not insist on a visa to enter. That six-month period was the single most important period in my life as it was during this time that I was transformed from a boy into a man, a time during which I realised I needed to take control of my life in order to achieve my dreams. My first proper stop in Turkey was in Istanbul, at a Hotel/B&B called the Buyuk Hotel Londra, a hotspot for other Iranian immigrants who, like me, were hoping to cross over into Europe or America, and it was during my one month stay at that hotel that I learned the significance of this life/business principle.

We homesick travellers would find comfort in each other's company as we gathered in the small reception room at the front of the hotel every day and exchanged our stories and offered each other emotional support. It was extraordinary to listen to the stories of this mix of people

The guests in the hotel were of three types. First were those who had just arrived with bags full of hope and a spring in their steps. I was one of these. To us everything was possible

and every day we were busy taking one step closer to our goal. Second were those who had been there for a few months and were beginning to see the reality of the challenge they were facing. Then there was the third group, those who had been there for years and had lost all hope and lived a half life in Turkey, travelling from one city to the next as they tried to somehow prolong their stay in this country which they had slowly got used to.

The process of getting a visa for another country was a complicated one and varied from one person to the next but generally we first needed to get legal advice and a representative and then apply for a visa. For us new guys everything was a novelty and we faced all problems with optimism and hope. The same could not be said of those who had been there much longer. I couldn't understand it; it was as if they weren't even trying any more. This group consisted mostly of men in their mid- to late-twenties who had been there anything from three to six years, living in a state of limbo. There was only one woman in that group, Fatemeh, who had been there for four years and was hoping to join her siblings in America. She was different from all the others. Every day she would leave the hotel with the same enthusiasm as the previous morning and every evening when we all regrouped at the hotel she would be as excited about her departure as we would be about ours, with the difference that she had tried and failed on many occasions. She had a nickname, Fati Los Angeles (Fati as short for Fatemeh), given to her by others who believed she was living in a fantasy world.

We became friends, friends by default, she looked very much like my mother and reminded me of her and I in turn reminded her of her younger brother. We used to spend as much time together as possible and she taught me the single most important lesson in life.

She explained to me that those guys who had been there for a few years had forgotten why they were there and why they had come in the first place. They had come hoping to go to the US but had now settled for a life that was nothing like their dream. She told me “They have lost that hope because every avenue they tried has proven to be a dead-end. What they fail to realise is that life is a game of numbers, you knock on as many doors as possible and one will open. It’s just a matter of time during which we are also bound to knock on a hell of a number of wrong doors. Just because one or 50 legal representations don’t work out it doesn’t mean my path to the US is blocked. It just means I have to try a different path. My dream is to go to the US,” she continued, “and I have left Iran for this purpose and this purpose is what I remind myself of every day when I wake up”. “Don’t ever forget your dream” she said “or before you know it you will wake up one day like those other guys, not being able to remember what you are doing here and why you left home”. A few weeks later she did indeed get her visa and I never saw her again, I hope she is happy wherever she is but I will never forget what I learned from her.

No matter what I do now I always put this lesson at the forefront of my mind and in order to remember this principle I have adopted a ritual.

I wake up every day and look at myself in the mirror and recite

“ Today my business needs me just like it did when we first launched it. Today I am going to achieve something great. My passion is the same, my belief is the same, my fire is the same and I will make sure my team also feels the same.”

And I always leave my house, saying to myself

“ Today is the first day of my business.”

You must walk into that office and bring the dream and the ultimate goal to the forefront of everyone’s mind. We are here for a reason and will stop at nothing to get it.

If you have not succeeded in your business it means you have encountered problems which have delayed your success. Now is the time to address them just as you used to address issues in the early days.

So remember, my friend, today like every other day is the first day of your business, and today you will take one step closer to achieving something great.

Don’t allow your ritual to turn into a routine

In order to implement our principles we are going to need rituals as they are designed to remind us of the things that are important. This could be a personal ritual so that every morning before you go to work you tell yourself “today is the first day of my business” or it could be a Post It note on your computer, or a written one the side of your coffee mug.

The problem with most rituals is that as time passes they turn into a routine too. Let me give you an example: we greet each other in the mornings with ‘good morning’ or ‘how are you’ but if you have noticed we don’t actually mean the words and we just repeat the phrases as something we are used to saying to others as others say it to us. By good morning we don’t actually mean ‘we hope today will be a good day for you’ and again by ‘how are you’ we don’t really mean ‘how are you feeling and do you have any issues or problems’. In the beginning maybe these phrases

and greetings translated into what the words really say but after a while they have become just a phrase and a meaningless ritual.

Daily prayers are a perfect example of this. The words of daily prayers are meant to remind the person praying of their relationship with god, and yet they recite it without feeling the meaning or the emotional content of its words. The person praying no longer means the emotional content of their prayers. It's just something they do before beginning their day, when in fact it was created as a ritual to remind them, every day and a few times a day, of what is supposed to be an important spiritual connection.

Whatever ritual you are going to use to remind yourself of this important business principle, it must not turn into just a routine. Posters, coffee mugs and Post It notes will not do. You are going to have to remind yourself of this principle by talking about it and meaning every word, reciting it in a language that matches your emotional state, something that will resonate with you and your team members today and every day. You need to explain what the words of the 'prayer' mean and what the 'prayer' stands for.

'Every day is the first day of my business' means today when I go to work I will constantly consider the business's ultimate goal and will do everything in my power to take one step closer to it.

The most powerful disaster is the subtle decay of a routine system

To wake up every day as though it was the first day of your business will prove harder to do than you might think and this is because there are only so many battles an entrepreneur and his team can fight.

Building a business from absolutely nothing means we wear the scars of many battles. Our minds have aged as we have had to go through sleepless nights, kept awake by the fear that tomorrow everything could come to a sudden halt, that tomorrow

might be the final day to pursue our dreams, and we may have to disappoint everyone in our camp and tell them it's all over. Being the warriors we are we get up in the morning and produce a miraculously positive front and bring that initial vision and dream to the forefront of our minds, and then every feeling of fear gets overshadowed by the self reminder that “yes, I can do this” and “maybe not today, but one day soon I will”.

But just how many days, weeks, months or even years of this long painful battle can one take?

I mean what do you do in such a situation? How do you pick yourself up and give yourself hope? More importantly how do you pick up the rest of your tired and shattered team and ask them to go through one final battle with you? Actually that would be relatively easy if you could persuade them that this was the final battle – if there was a clear sign that all you needed to do was to fight one more battle. How great it would be if all challenges in life were like a boxing match and you knew when the final round was? In contrast with a fight where you still have to give it everything you have got, round after round, not knowing for how long. This is what makes this journey much harder. Every single person has it in them to be the best they can be for a specific period of time. But not everyone is able to be the best they can be and make incredible sacrifices for an unlimited period of time, keeping going and not giving up day after day never knowing when they will receive the reward.

In a search for the City of Gold you and a few chosen others have started a journey through the desert. In the desert all the mountains look the same and there is no end in sight. All you can do is hope and push forward. After months of walking against sand storms and being thirsty and hungry, you have now reached

an oasis – not quite the City of Gold you promised yourself and your followers – but an oasis with a source of water and shade. But you know in your heart that if you were to push forward for a little longer you would reach your dream destination. How do you convince yourself and your followers that you should not settle for the oasis, for second best, but that you have to push forward in search of the City of Gold?

Many have lapsed in their faith and have accepted the oasis as their destiny and have agreed amongst themselves that they should be proud of what they have achieved.

This is particularly hard because although you have not reached your ultimate business dream you have actually been able to pay the bills without facing any immediate dangers and now there is no longer any urgency in having to make it work.

All these years you have had to fight competitors on all sides and you have been fighting and reacting to problems at an incredible speed facing nonstop challenges.

But now what was once an idea has become a business that keeps the roof over your head.

There is all of a sudden a whisper – a voice comforting you that maybe it wasn't supposed to happen in the time frame you gave yourself. "Maybe I should begin to appreciate what I have rather than thinking about the empire I did not manage to build."

Everyone in the business becomes more understanding about failures and all of a sudden headline business news becomes relative to your business and you are slowly but surely convinced that you need to sit this one out and wait for the market to change.

You will become more patient with your competitors and you will be more logical and analytical than before –you will think, for example, that they won't last in the market and that they will not be able to go through what you have. You will be comforted that this is just a phase.

This is the most dangerous phase because ‘the most powerful disaster in business is the subtle decay of a routine system’.

If I was to dig a hole in your tooth you would feel an alarmingly sharp pain and would jump out of your chair. I would have to knock you unconscious to achieve this without your awareness.

However, we often suffer from tooth decay that has reached the nerves because of years of slow but regular decay.

This is so because we begin to get used to what is eating into the heart of the tooth. The decay is so subtle and slow that we don't notice it and we get used to it until it hits the nerve by which time it's too late and it needs to be pulled out.

Such types of decay can be disastrous because despite their damage, they continue to spread unnoticed in the system and often when we do become aware of them the only solution is some drastic and costly surgery.

When a business hits that comfortable phase and starts to turn into a routine operation, without your initial care, attention and sense of urgency, the decay begins to sit in the heart of the operation and after a year or so you will realise that it has spread far too deep and the only solution is to make critical changes which could include losing once key personnel, initiating aggressive marketing campaigns and other costly activities – probably too costly for a small business to be able to endure.

I am telling you all this not so you can look back at your business and say “now I know why I failed.” I am telling you so you can keep an eye out for this phase and if you think what I am telling you bears some resemblance to your own experience, then be warned that this is your darkest hour and if you don't wake up now it will all be too late to salvage.

Make sales the driving force of change

You must watch out for this sign; the telltale sign of this transformation from a business into a job, from a challenge into a routine, is a noticeable move from 'what you ask your office to do' to 'what your office asks you to do'. This is crucial because employees tend to walk into their office ready to fulfil whatever tasks the office might bring to them. They react to the demands of the office. At first glance this might seem good as the employee's task is surely to ensure the office's needs are provided for (by office I mean their work location), but in that case the employee is only reacting and not proacting and the direction of the business is being determined by external forces. I have seen many business like this where the daily lives of its team members are determined by the events of the day – dealing with incoming calls, handling service issues, posting packages and ordering stock and the like. Everyone is doing what the office demands of them. With every business you also need to consider the long-term as well as short-term goals and make sure the duties of your team members take such goals into account. After all your everyday challenge is to take one step closer to your ultimate business goal.

One of the most challenging problems in business is to evaluate the productivity of the team members. When a business is young and in the 'shaping' phase, all efforts are focused on staying alive and the day-to-day activities of the company are directly determined by its customers. This is the case because a young business does not have too many customers therefore those few but vital customers will get more attention than they would otherwise be able to demand.

Whether we choose to or not, in the early days all we do is a direct result of the customer's wants and needs. At this stage every business becomes a 'customer pleaser' and regardless of the nature of the task, we openheartedly accept all enquiries and deliver at all costs, so that we can build a loyal customer base and a powerful brand.

In the later stages of the business, you will find it becomes harder and more complicated to evaluate the productivity of your team members and even your own. The company falls into a particular structure and people within the company find their routines, and although they are essential in maintaining day-to-day matters these routines do not take into account the prime business dream or the long-term goal of the business.

Make ‘sales’ the driving engine of your business and enforcer of change.

Instead of trying different strategies and introducing new offers or marketing campaigns, start from a different angle.

You will remember I said that in the initial phase of a business we are 100% focused on winning business and increasing sales. As sales grow new customers start to demand the highest level of service from you to justify leaving their old service providers, which in turn begins to dictate your daily activities.

Therefore sales sit at the heart of the business and it's the starting point of a domino effect, winning the customer who then in turn will demand your 100% focus.

Start with your sales team and give them a daily target, a figure which they need to add to the business at the end of every working day. For example tell your sales team that you want them to increase revenue by £20 a day per sales person (By sales I mean any activity or challenge that can increase the company's revenue).

At the start of the day ask them to identify where this increase is coming from so their success cannot be claimed from uncontrollable activities in the market place.

Ask them to announce their productivity at the end of each day. Make them 100% sales focused so they can no longer blame the 'one million routine things' they have been doing before.

Don't get me wrong. I am not suggesting your sales team have been taking it easy or avoiding sales. What I am saying is that as the business grows most of your team members evolve into being multitaskers and their daily routine is no longer a focused task and is, instead, a mixture of different activities. In this situation it's hard to question if someone is doing their job as they should because as each day passes they find themselves extremely busy with other tasks and as the day ends they won't even know where the time has gone. So they are not lazy but you are not sure how they have benefited the company.

Other team members have also created an interdependent system where they ask each other's help throughout the day so no single task is being carried out by one person. This is at the heart of all your difficulties.

By identifying your key sales people and giving them a daily target you have pushed them into being focused on your dream.

By giving the team a daily sales target and making them revenue-orientated, you have simply managed to untangle this chaotic daily routine. Everybody will come to work and instead of just following any existing direction, they will be now automatically organised by this new attractor. They won't be distracted by what the 'office' asks them to do but will instead 'ask what the office can do for the business' by utilising everything at their disposal to meet their sales target,

This is not a pay-related target. It could be but it's not essential. By asking someone to illustrate how much they have contributed to the business you have created a situation where this individual will do all in their power not to announce zero.

You have now set up a system on which your team members will act to save their reputation.

The 'born-again' sales team

A couple of years ago we faced the worst type of service issue – it affected the quality of our product for nearly two weeks and lost us up to 40% of our customer base. After this disastrous period we tried to pick ourselves up from the floor by calling and visiting those lost customers, but somehow our efforts were not having the expected impact. The reason, contrary to what we first thought, wasn't the ripple effect of our recent service issue but the nature of our sales team's approach. I immediately called a meeting and introduced the team to 'the born again sales team' campaign which helped us recover 80% of our lost customer base.

So before you can reinforce 'sales' as the 'driving force of change' you need to first read and enforce.

In every business, after a certain period of stability and success, there comes a time when we start to believe that our customers SHOULD use our service and everything becomes very simple in our minds; we believe 'we work hard and are passionate about what we do and our customers use us because they see this passion and sacrifice'. In another words our expectation from the customer turns into a demand, a demand for their loyalty. Why? Because we work hard!

After a while this point of view takes over the entire relationship and the way we communicate with the customers.

And then along comes the stormy night. The morning after, we start rebuilding the old bridges between us and the customers. We soon realise that somehow, this time, it's just not as easy as it used to be. We remain patient and give it a little time, but soon see that something has changed. Everyone starts to push as hard as they can and yet again results are minimal.

This was the moment of enlightenment for me. It seemed we had lost sight of the customer/service provider relationship over the previous two years, our ‘golden age’.

It seemed our success and the market leadership we had achieved over this long time had led us to believe that a customer’s loyalty was a given, as a reward for our passion and hard work.

This problem did not arise because my team lacked focus or didn’t do their jobs right. Not at all. This is a natural progress of the customer/service provider relationship after a long time of loyalty and exclusive business. After a while boundaries are broken and a business relationship is replaced by a personal one, a relationship affected by emotions. Although this can reinforce the business, in times of major crisis it’s not enough to win back the lost loyalty.

And let me assure you this is not unique to us, not at all. I have seen it happen time and time again to bigger and smaller companies.

So, what is the answer?

We need to strip our company of its overconfidence and this ‘demanding approach’ which has been the worm eating its way through the apple.

“ Today my team will be Born Again.”

“ **Today** is the day when my team joined our company for the first time, all over again. **Today** is the day when my team is re-employed and re-introduced to the business for the very first time, all over again.”

“ **Today** is the day when my team will be re-introduced to our customers, all over again.”

“ **Today** is the day my team will forget everything they know about the business and have to re-learn it, all over again.”

“ **Today** is the day my team will start relearning what our customers want.”

“ **Today** is the day when my team will start to rebuild their relationship with the customers, all over again.”

Somehow in the process of learning their names, how many children they have, and their likes and dislikes, it seems we have forgotten how our customers pay their bills and what they secretly wish us to do for them. And this is key in business; not necessarily because we can do it all but because it helps us understand our customers better.

“ **Today** is the day where we look at our customers as customers whose business needs and requirements must be examined from the ground up.”

“ **Today** we will begin to learn how much our customers' rents have gone up in the last year. How much has their business been affected by new technologies? How is the credit crunch affecting them? Which days of the week are their busiest and which weeks the busiest in their year? These were the questions to which we knew all the answers when we first became their service provider.”

“ **Today** we are taking it back to basics; **today** we are born again.”

THE RIDDLE THAT IS 'OPPORTUNITY'

The success of your business is as much dependent on others as it is on you, because it is these others whose positions, contacts, and decision-making powers you will need if you are ever to find that life-changing opportunity that seems so far beyond your reach. However, before you go knocking on their doors, you must first understand what an opportunity is.

Never forget to ask 'Why me?'

In the early days of the business, while searching for that golden opportunity, I used to pursue, investigate and get overexcited about almost every single business proposal that sounded promising and I was naively overoptimistic about the possible outcome of my meetings with the CEOs of our market's leading companies, meetings which I had managed to arrange either by sheer persistence or by pulling a few favours from my buddies in the industry. I used to think an opportunity was something 'these others' could create for us.

In those days any mention of an introductory meeting with such a CEO would have in my mind translated into "This is it. They are interested in doing business with us." All it took was for someone to agree to meet with me and I'd think we were one step

away from that life-changing deal. It seemed like every day I had some good news to share with my team and every day someone was about to offer us that golden opportunity. As a matter of fact opportunities were flying in from every corner, but those proposals just turned out to be nothing more than discussions, and not knowing why was the worst part of that process.

After a year of relentless pursuit of all possible proposals and meetings with every single contact that I had, I decided to take a step back and rethink our strategy.

And I realised that there is a difference between a proposal and an opportunity and the difference is far more obvious than having to use complex qualification procedures to identify. The key wasn't necessarily to do with the nature of the proposals but with something much closer to home – to do with us.

I realised that the key aspect of any opportunity is in the 'why should they consider me' factor. Does our company have something unique, I mean tangibly unique and not in our minds, for us to have been offered this proposal? Basically, could just anyone do this job or does this particular task need a unique set-up similar to ours? This is the difference between a proposal and an opportunity.

You too must look at your business and ask yourself this question: do any of my meetings possess this criterion? Do I have anything unique to offer the parties involved which is crucial to their plans? And if you realise that apart from your passion and dedication you don't really possess anything unique then you must realise, as I did, that the honeymoon period of your business is over and that you are going to have to focus on creating your customer base, your infrastructure, or something, which in time would become your unique selling point. The confidence evident in the approach of well-established companies is a confidence derived from having been in the business for a number of years and having created a set-up that addresses specific issues related

to their industry. This is where you want to be too, something that makes you a perfect candidate for solid partnerships.

Only then will you know it is because of what you have that others are approaching you with proposals, because what you have is something unique and hard to find.

Although you might have less good news to get excited about and share with your team, it will all represent solid opportunities with real potential.

This principle is doubly important because not only will it help you understand what others are looking for when talking about opportunities, but it will also make you wary of those who try to use your passion and ambition for their own dishonest gains, whatever they may be. When people know what we want sometimes they use this to get our attention and their motives aren't always the same as ours, but unfortunately we only find this out when it's too late. The only way to avoid such costly and time-consuming disappointments is to follow this simple principle.

Unlike my naive days, I no longer rely on lucky deals or favours, and if someone contacts me for a possible venture I immediately look for a reason as to why they are talking to me and if I can't find one I will not spend too much time investigating it.

So, before you go knocking on everyone's door looking for that golden opportunity, you must first create something unique in your business which makes you eligible for that opportunity. The worth of your business is all about the uniqueness of your set-up, and creating that uniqueness is the starting point of a business.

The key thing to remember is that 'you must become as much of an opportunity for the opportunity maker as they are for you'.

Become a link in the chain

Every market or industry is kept together like a chain made up of key links – key suppliers and key customers – all the way from the initial service provider down to the end user, and the challenge of any new business is to find its place in this chain and become one of the key links. You need to become a key player in your industry.

This is when you will know you have achieved the previously discussed unique selling point; the only sign of having something unique is to find a solid place in this chain.

Don't get me wrong; getting connected to the chain isn't the challenge as this could easily be achieved by becoming a secondary link, a link connected to one of the main links. Just imagine a physical chain where every link is connected to the next; the life lines of these links are dependent on their immediate connections. Now imagine other smaller or secondary links connected to each of these links; if one of these secondary links were to disappear it wouldn't really have an impact on the stability of the chain.

Just consider the simple chain below:

Service Provider + Distributor + Retailer + End user

The distributor buys from the service provider and sells to the retailer, this is its position in the chain and its business plan, and its life is dependent on these two transactions. The product moves down the chain, from the service provider through the distributor and the retailer until it reaches the end user.

Now imagine the chain below:

Service Provider + Distributor + Retailer + End user
+
You

You have now entered the market and have connected yourself to the distributor in order to enter the chain. You have a product you want to sell to the end user and, based on your circumstances and

abilities, you have decided the best way to reach your goal is to enter via the distributor.

However although the distributor enjoys the additional revenue from your business it wouldn't really be affected if your business were to stop tomorrow, and that is because it already gets its business from the other current prominent service providers. The same applies to the end user. Your absence won't really affect their daily routine because of the existence of that same key service provider in the chain.

This happens when you don't offer anything unique to the chain. A lot of new businesses pin their hopes on such connections to the chain and all they end up achieving is surviving rather than growing and becoming the business empire they once dreamed of. In such scenarios the new business enters the chain selling probably the same old products without any additional value to other parts of the chain. The only way you can become a key link is to look at the business model of each player and figure out a way of offering them something over and above what the other links currently do.

This you can achieve in a number of ways, one of which has a more long-term benefit than the other.

Depending on how far down the chain you are from the end user, you can either keep the focus on your actual product and create a demand from the end user, who will in turn request your product from the retailer and so on, or you can keep your focus on the benefit you can offer the other links, something which makes them push your product over and above the rest because there is more benefit in it for them to do so. This could be credit terms (longer than they currently get), or higher margins and so on. Either way you will find a solid place in the link, one without which the interest of other links will be affected; only now your absence will be felt by the chain and now you can say I have something unique to offer the industry.

However as I just said one method has a longer life cycle than the other and that one is the first, keeping your focus on the end user. At the end of the day it doesn't matter how much of an agreement you have with the retailers or distributors as it is the end user who passes the final judgment on the value of your product. In many industries key service providers try to limit the choice of end users by influencing the decisions of the other links in between. You could call it a mafia-type mentality where they control the flow of the product. This method does work but if a new company, one that keeps its focus on offering the best possible solution to the end user, is able to somehow reach the end user then they will definitely be able to break the chain.

Just remember this important lesson: just because you have a very good product it doesn't mean your business will work. You will have to find a way of getting it to the end user. Your choice of the above methods is really dependent on your position and dependency on the other links. If you don't have the means to approach the end users then you are going to have to keep your focus on the retailers and distributors as mentioned above.

But I strongly suggest you build a business plan that includes some kind of direct relationship with the end user.

Marketing is the only way to create the demand within the end-user market; many companies do that but it can be a very costly exercise, one which would require regular investment. If you can come up with more innovative and cost effective marketing ideas you will find yourself in a different position. Other links will contact you in order to do business with you because if they don't then another link will. Once you have figured out how to benefit the end user you must somehow inform them of your offering.

They in turn will demand your product from their local stores and the store will have to sell your product. If you have the budget then this is the path you should take, because with the end user on your side no other link can remove you from the chain. This is the same old story as in politics; you could have an idea on how your country or government should operate but need finances to communicate your ideas with the public and this is where the power of marketing comes into play and why politicians depend on donations and funds. Sometimes the party with the biggest budget will end up winning and not the one with the right policies.

Now that you have understood the importance of becoming a key link you also need to identify and locate the other key links to which you will need to connect to in order to complete or create your own chain, and this isn't always an easy task as these links aren't always obvious.

OK, let's say you are now looking for the key distributor who would become the bridge between you and your potential customers. To achieve this you won't need to search the land and hope for a secret meeting with the one contact who would introduce you to this distributor. Not at all; all you have to do is just to somehow enter this chain and the principles of business would take you to him/her.

Principles of business? Yes, Principle of Business. You will soon realise that key links are few, as well as active and influential. All you would need to do is enter this chain and ask the question.

By definition you are looking for an influential and active link, which means he or she is well known in the market.

There are more people who are willing to help your business than you may think. Of course the way you present yourself has a lot to

do with it and if you look and sound ambitious then people would immediately see a short- or long-term benefit in knowing you. Not from an emotionless, materialistic, or a negative angle, but something that comes naturally to all businessmen. They will tell you what they know because they too are in business and you may represent a potentially alternative solution for their business.

And above all there is something rewarding about being the early influencer in a potentially new company. You are a new company in this new industry, or even country, and based on how professionally and competently you represent yourself all the links you meet would have the gratification of knowing they were the early supporters of what may become a key player in this market. The cherry on the top would be a few promises of future preferential treatment, which you must keep when you are ready for trade.

So start visiting your potential clients and go to the areas where your end users are, with the mission of finding perhaps only the one link who is able to give you the key distributor, and the rest will take its course.

One thing to remember is the timing and stages of each phase. Approaching the chain and joining it is a sensitive part of the business and you must do this after you have done your initial market research, have set up the company and have some basic services available.

These key links are not here to tell you whether you should or should not enter their industry or set up a business in their country. You need to make this decision based on other data. They need to meet you when you have already set up a business and have something tangible to show them to illustrate what unique selling points you are hoping to bring to their market. If you meet them too early then your lack of knowledge and experience could cost you dear.

Don't let the chain intimidate you. From the outside there is little you can do. **Join the chain.**

There is no point daydreaming and hoping for a miracle. Become a link in the chain and before you know it you are the new buzz everyone is talking about. This is the pulse of business. The heart of business. This is where the picture becomes complete and that funny notion called confidence plays the role it was born for.

The world belongs to those who believe in themselves.

As an entrepreneur you have a unique talent for interactive business. Your mind is waiting, ready to recognise a synergy and magically turn the people you meet into potential members of your 'dream chasing' team, which also includes other key links. The entrepreneur is like a processing machine that comes to life as soon as he or she meets other people. Other people play the most important part on our path to achieving our dreams and there is no talent greater than having the ability to inject passion into those we meet and motivate them to get involved with our project.

This is all in the process of becoming a link in the chain.

Confidence is a funny notion. It's not logical and yet extremely powerful. Until you have actually secured your position in the chain you will feel like a tourist who is in denial about his business dreams, although you will be pushing yourself to follow your business principles, in the belief that one day it will come together. In the meanwhile you will feel naked and exposed. The business just won't feel real to you; you will be a tourist in an industry that doesn't really care about your existence.

Something doesn't feel right. You have no links to the business chain and every time you try to imagine the business going forward you will come to a sudden halt, and you will remember that you have no contacts and how problems are impossible to resolve in a reasonable time frame. And when exposed in this way you don't stand a chance in front of a competitor who is fighting in his own backyard.

You need to change that today by giving yourself the goal of overcoming this challenge and becoming a link in this chain. Do this today and in a few days you will start receiving calls and emails from key players who have been a significant link in this industry's chain from its early days. All of a sudden you will find yourself right in the mix, where you have been trying to be from the start of your business venture.

I overcame my challenges in the Netherlands when we launched our business there, and on that day, on the tram in Amsterdam on my way home, I had a different feeling about myself. I felt connected and local, no longer a tourist. The world we live in is far less complicated than we make it out to be. I have heard time and time again that 'the world belongs to those who are willing to take it' and I truly believe this, not because I have taken it but because I am about to.

All you need to do is to identify what your next step is going to be and make all the preparations necessary to get you there. Not being part of the business chain scared me the most but it was by far the easiest hurdle to overcome and I promise you it will be the same for you.

Qualification is the first preparation

Now that you have that unique selling point to attract opportunities you must be able to qualify which opportunity is in fact for you and which is not. Because as much as it is important to know why someone has chosen to do business with you it is as

important for you to know why you should do business with them. Or not.

For this you are going to need a system that sifts through and separates opportunities from enquiries.

A few years ago, when our business was just beginning to take its shape, my sales person came to me with a prospect and insisted that I go to see a client with him to ensure we get the deal before he signed up with one of our competitors. Those days our focus was on selling white label pre-paid telephone cards. However because of the market's competitive nature we would only work with customers who had an existing distribution chain and an existing customer base – basically someone who was already in the business. After my sales guy presented me with his case I cancelled my trip to Amsterdam and agreed to meet the customer with him, and the next day we started our long drive up north, to Bradford, a good few hours away from London. We had arranged to meet the client in a hotel, which, as it happens, is normal in our line of business. As soon as we got there I booked a table and started going through the points with my sales guy while we waited for the customer's arrival. Ten to fifteen minutes later I saw a man, wearing a pair of slippers and holding a couple of Tesco shopping bags, and otherwise very casually dressed, looking around for someone. "No way is that the customer" I said to myself. He then started phoning someone and my sales person's phone began to ring; he was the contact we had come all this way see. So the meeting got under way and after a couple of minutes of small talk I asked the key question, "What is your current business model?"

It was as if he had been waiting for someone to ask him that question so he could share his secret with them. He

lowered his voice, looked around and came a little closer to both of us and said "I have a part-time job in a local hospital and one day a week when I go to buy phone cards for myself, to call my home country, I also take money from my friends and colleagues and bulk buy, so I have been thinking why not do my own card, you see?" "How many cards is that exactly?" I asked, "Ten" he replied, and that was weekly in case you didn't catch that.

Of course he had his own expansion ideas and was sure, with the right product, he could increase his sales to 30 cards a week, but our company's minimum sales requirements was 2,000 cards a week at that time. When I gave him our weekly targets he paused for a while and then said "Maybe I can do this, if you give me a card cheaper than all the other cards, and with a much better quality, and 30-60 days credit (as opposed to our absolute pre-paid policy), then maybe I can do it in within a year." Basically he wanted something like £70,000 credit from us to test his business plan.

Within ten minutes the meeting was over. It was a complete disaster. We had not only lost a day with a lot of travelling expenses but I had also cancelled my European trip, all of which would have been avoided if the right questions had only been asked prior to the meeting. Although I admired his ambition I had to apologise for wasting his time and told him we were the wrong type of company for him and couldn't help him with his business dreams. So we said goodbye and started our long drive back to London.

The fact of the matter is that a good business idea can actually start on a very small scale, as long as it's presented to the right people or a company that is prepared to manage small re-sellers, and although his business idea was too small for us I am sure someone out there would have been prepared to give him a variation of what he needed and be patient with

him to grow it. And this makes the nature of opportunity 'relative'.

During that long and uncomfortable drive back to London I asked my sales guy if he had in fact qualified the prospect. It turned out when asked 'How many cards do you sell?' the customer had replied 'Quite a few but could do a lot more' and when asked 'How?', he had replied 'I currently sell to hospital workers', and to 'How many years you have been doing this?', he had said "Years".

Everyone thinks their business idea is worthwhile. The question is whether it's worth everyone's while, and your task in business is to find out whether it's worth yours or not.

You don't need to have a hunch or a sixth sense to be able to qualify an opportunity effectively. There are actually systems and techniques in place which you can use, but you need to believe in them and put your trust in them. You need to identify certain indicators when talking to your customers and make sure you get the exact answers, and absolutely avoid generalised, vague answers. And remember; there is no such thing as an uncomfortable question – there is only an uncomfortable way of asking it.

There is a lot of material available on 'prospect qualification' techniques but I would like to introduce you to one I am fond of and leave it to you to investigate others further if you wish.

This is the SCOTSMAN, a very popular tool used in most sales companies.

It stands for:

- **Solution** = *what is the solution and can you deliver it?*
- **Competition** = *who are your competitors?*
- **Originality** = *can you offer something unique to this project?*
- **Timescale** = *can you deliver the solution in the agreed timescale?*

- **Size** = *is the size of the opportunity worth your efforts?*
- **Money** = *has the customer set aside a budget for this solution?*
- **Authority** = *are you talking to the decision maker?*
- **Need** = *are you aware of all your customer's needs and can you cover them?*

I am not sure of its origins but this technique does work at all scales. It's a simple checklist that will help you establish whether a suspect is in fact a prospect, and whether an opportunity is nothing more than just an enquiry.

No matter how small your company and how casual your meetings with your customers, you need to come away from the meeting with enough information to be able to tick the SCOTSMAN list.

There is only one item missing from this technique and that is the customer's ability to deliver the solution. I think because this technique is mainly used by corporate companies it is generally assumed that the customer can deliver the solution. However when starting up your own business or when running a small organisation you should know you are not the only hopeful in the equation, as you will be dealing with enquiries from others who are also planning to start their own companies. But not all hopefuls understand business as well as they should and they think just because they want to do something it means they can, or just because someone else is doing it they can do it too. They overlook the simple fact that whoever is successful at something must have something unique to offer in the project.

Therefore when using SCOTSMAN please add one more criterion to it and call it **Ability** and go through **ASCOTSMAN**, and the first question would become "*What does the customer have that makes them think they can deliver this solution*".

At the end of the day it really doesn't matter which technique you end up using just as long as you have thought about your business needs, have identified the key elements

which you and your customers must possess, and made a list for yourself to tick when discussing opportunities with potential clients and partners.

The wave, the surfer, and the wave-maker

We all create our own businesses in order to benefit from certain opportunities therefore it is important for us to decide, at the start as well as throughout the course of the business, what type of opportunity we are most suited to target.

In my view there are three types of opportunities in every market;

- 1) **The Wave:** this is when a new craze or idea hits the market and becomes fashionable.
- 2) **The Surfer:** this is the individual who waits for such a wave in order to take advantage of this new idea by joining its supply chain.
- 3) And then of course **the Wave-Maker:** this is the individual or company who starts the craze and the fashion by being the first to introduce it to the market.

All three positions can offer us some kind of opportunity but they all have different requirements and will need a different type of company set-up.

Before we go any further I think we need to look at a few examples in order to clarify the definitions:

Wave Maker = Microsoft was the wave maker in the 'personal computer' market and introduced a new concept to the world. We all agree that although personal computers existed as a product before Microsoft they weren't commercialised and ready for the consumer market until of course Mr Gates focused his interest and energy on the product.

Wave = this created a wave when the idea of personal computers became a fashionable concept and a few key brands started

competing with each other in order to meet the market's demand for the product.

Surfer = this wave gave birth to a generation of retailers and technical support teams that offered some kind of service to the end users and brought the product to the masses and bridged the gap between technology and end users.

When you start up your own business you must know which you can be and which you want to be, as each has its own requirements, risks, and rewards.

The wave-maker

To become the wave-maker, by definition, requires heavy investment introducing a new product to the world. It requires investment on all fronts, as the concept needs to be developed, tested and marketed. We are all inspired by individuals such as Mr Gates and hope to become the wave-maker in a certain market but with this option comes a definite risk of failure because timing is of the essence and if for any reason the project is delayed or rejected the wave-maker stands to lose all his/her investment. There are many examples of failed wave-makers but one I personally witnessed, and was active in. It was the introduction of ADSL broadband to the UK market. At the time I was working in British Telecom's Wholesale Services, a division created by BT to comply with the regulator's demands to give access to other emerging licensed operators and allow them to compete with BT. When anyone spoke of BT, or telecoms in general, they would automatically think of making phone calls – this was the traditional voice market. In early 1999 the internet was still a relatively new concept and if you remember (which you may not as many of you would never have used it) dial-up was the most common method of accessing the internet. As the technology was being developed we started to hear about a new concept called ADSL broadband. Even in BT we weren't really sure what it was but a

few visionary start-ups had the idea of taking high-speed internet to the masses in the UK by utilising a part of BT's network which they needed to gain access to. In theory the idea was great and both the technology as well as the infrastructure were there to make it happen, and because of the growing demand from the end-users (both residential and commercial) the business plans seemed viable too. As a result a few companies decided to become the first to develop this technology and approached BT in order to gain access to its network. Due to the complexities that arise within a company the size of BT, what should have been a smooth transition took a few years to accomplish and a number of these hopeful start-ups just didn't have the funds to wait that long. They lost their momentum and eventually faded away. The timing wasn't right, but there was always going to be that initial transitional period which meant there were always going to be a few who would have lost that initial fight. But that paved the way for future market leaders who eventually got the concept off the ground, and the rest, as they say, is history.

As you can see timing is the key for becoming a wave-maker and this is not always something in our control. It involves a number of different factors which have to come together to create the right conditions – I guess this is what you could call the emergence of order out of chaos – and the wave-maker needs to consider the high risks associated with this opportunity.

The wave

The wave, in my opinion, is the best of all three options for a start-up company. Why be the first to invest all your energy and capital on an idea that has elements out of your control? You can always wait for others with far more capabilities, to create the wave so you can become part of a proven system. Although the wave-maker has the first mover advantage the market has a place for more than one successful brand, and instead of being the first

you can become one of the early players; just as many did when ADSL eventually became a viable product. I don't know of anything that Richard Branson has done in which he was a pioneer, but everything he has done has always been about offering the best possible package at the right time; he is never the wave-maker but usually a very successful wave.

The risk associated with being the wave is competition as others will be waiting on the sidelines looking to become the wave too and the speed at which you achieve this will be key. You need to watch and study the market at all times and follow the progress of the wave-makers in your chosen industries, and have the knowledge necessary to be able to establish yourself as a reputable brand when the time comes as this is what your competitors will be doing. Have you ever noticed, regardless of its slow and uncertain start, how quickly a market becomes saturated and how fast a few brands become the leaders, once a concept has managed to enter the market? These are the watchful few who didn't want to be or couldn't be the wave-makers but managed to perfectly position themselves to be the wave and become one of the leading brands to offer this new product.

The surfer

The surfer is by far the easiest position to obtain as you can join the supply chain with minimum investment and take advantage of a product that has already become fashionable. Many start-ups with little capital naturally become surfers. The wave-maker has successfully introduced a product into the market, followed by a number of key players who are now offering their own branded version of this product, and the surfer will now join the supply chain and help take these products to the mass market and to the end user. The position of the surfer is the position of the reseller, whether as a retailer or as a wholesaler, and their income is determined by the difference between what they buy and what

they sell. Since the price at which they buy is more or less the same for all, and since many resellers will also be selling the same brands, they will end up reducing their own mark-ups in order to win customers, and this is how they find themselves in saturated and competitive markets with low returns. Dependent on how quickly the reseller joins the supply chain he/she can enjoy a period of high volume sales, but this will be short-lived as other hungry entrepreneurs will quickly spot the same opportunity. Many entrepreneurs have made a living from being the early surfers in up-and-coming industries, but again it's all about the timing.

There is however a way for the surfer to enjoy a longer period of healthy margins and that is by signing exclusive dealership agreements with one or more of the key brands. But an entrepreneur with little seed capital can very seldom achieve such status, because in offering exclusivity the key brands would dictate some kind of minimum sales order. Nevertheless these are the points you must consider if you are going to choose the role of surfer.

At the start of your business you must decide which you are going to be: Wave, Surfer or Wave-Maker.

Based on your strengths and weaknesses, you must decide which of the above you are going to be, and then you must consider your short- and long-term plans and make sure they are in line with your chosen position's risks and rewards.

Opportunity might be hard to find but it can be simple in structure

Turning an idea into a fully functioning business, especially with little seed capital, means years of painstaking hard work and sacrifice. Therefore the picture we create in our minds about success and opportunity is that of hard graft and complexity.

A business is a truly complicated system to create and it has multiple sections that need to be managed on a daily basis and altogether it requires 24/7 dedication and care. Once we have gone through all the hardships setting up our own business we will get used to the idea of 'difficulty' and accept it as the bedrock of success; after all how else could I become successful if it has taken me so many years just to create a fully functioning business? Surely a great money-making opportunity would also require a similar amount of time and dedication?

The key point to grasp is that a business is different from an opportunity in as much as a business is a structure for managing and even finding opportunities. A business is also a system through which we maintain and grow an opportunity. As we said before: 'the more unique this system the more chances you will have for finding opportunities'.

Opportunity on the other hand is a 'need' which is addressed and provided for through this structure (i.e. through a business).

Unfortunately we often confuse the two.

A friend of mine used to work for a major investment company in the UK with interests in the Middle East. After a while he left his job and decided to set up his own business and start working for himself in order to make that life-changing financial jump. His wife and he opened a luxury gym in Iran, a fully functioning health complex, but it took them two to three years to set it up and open it to the public. Every time I spoke with him he would confess how difficult he was finding it to make any serious money and that he would need to create a chain of gyms, which would mean a few more years of even harder effort, before he could come close to his dream. However, his life was about to change in a most unexpected way. His previous European background enabled him to offer a foreigner-friendly environment which began to attract expats (expatriates) working in Iran. As it

happens one such regular client turned out to be the director of operations for a major 'exercise machinery' manufacturer in the Middle East. Their company imported their health and training equipment to Iran through an exclusive agent. They were not happy with their agent and were looking for someone already established to take over the business. My friend's already set-up business meant the platform for launching such a simple service existed already and he could use his own gym to showcase the equipment to potential buyers. After a few weeks of negotiation he won the dealership and made his first million in less than a year, whereas his health-exercise complex had taken three years just to break even.

The question remains; could he have got the same dealership if he hadn't owned his own gym? Would he have been able to approach the manufactures directly and pitch the same idea to them? I think the answer is yes but the point is 'not that easily or smoothly'.

First: an opportunity like that doesn't surface that often and it's not something that you will hear about if you are not in the business. It's not as if the manufacturer was going to advertise its disappointment with its previous dealer and jeopardise the image of the operation in Iran.

Secondly: if my friend hadn't had his existing gym business he wouldn't have been able to introduce this new opportunity into its system so quickly and efficiently. Although simple in structure and high in reward, this new opportunity needed an existing business platform for it to be re-launched and re-positioned, and by that I mean having a company with a bank account and history of trade and a client-friendly gym environment to showcase the equipment.

Every time we now speak he tells me how he can't believe how easy it is to make money and that opportunities are sometimes very simple with unbelievably high rewards.

As I said, once we go through that initial hardship of creating a business from scratch we get used to that hardship and accept it as the prerequisite of any opportunity. We still think of opportunity as something with the same level of complexity.

Sometimes we are presented with simple opportunities but our entrepreneurial mind quickly re-evaluates the proposal and if it's too simple to accomplish we tend to pass on it because we are convinced it won't work. We are certain that the only way to make money is the hard way so we look for a proposal that requires a fair amount of work and set-up, matching our mental version of opportunity, one that is in line with our own experience of setting up our own business. Even in fact where an opportunity could be extremely simple in structure and only needs a basic business set-up.

The point to remember is that the simplicity and complexity of the opportunity is to do with how saturated its market is and how novel and in demand the proposal is. Therefore the only way to evaluate an opportunity is to look and see what unique selling points you have which can address the needs of the proposed opportunity, and equally what unique selling points can the other parties bring to the deal.

Sometimes the best opportunities can be the simplest ones.

**Maybe I am just a hero in preparation,
drinking from the 'Well of Possibilities'**

Although this is by far one of the most influential reasons for why we sometimes fail to take a shot at a clearly visible opportunity, it is at the same time one of the most elusive ones. If I had more time I would definitely have dedicated an entire book to this section as this principle alone has changed the way I think, the way

I view my life in relation to my dreams and goals (be it business or personal).

Would you believe it if I told you that some of the most dedicated, motivated, passionate and hungry business people of all, such as you the reader, subconsciously, and in extreme cases consciously, seek paths and make business choices that actually take them further away from their goals and business dreams?

Simply put: you may have started your journey as an entrepreneur with the aim of building a successful business empire, but along the way

You will do whatever you can to avoid those golden, entrepreneurial opportunities that could make your dreams come true.

“Impossible!” I can hear you think. “Anyone who did such a thing would be insane!” you may say.

Well, nothing could be further from the truth.

What sits at the heart of our positive and tenacious attitude is our absolute belief in the possibility of achieving our goals, so that we believe ‘what we want to achieve is in fact possible’ and that our chosen path will finally get us there. In other words our dream future belongs to the category of things possible, and it is this notion of possibility that spurs us on and gives us that unstoppable momentum. Nothing can quite match the momentum of a believer. Therefore we will sometimes try to avoid any challenge or encounter that could undermine the validity of our belief system and we will do anything to delay the much anticipated results of our efforts, a result that could shatter our dreams and change their position from ‘all things possible’ to ‘all things impossible’, a shift that will shatter our hope for the future.

Let’s explore this a little further. During your empire building journey you will have to face and overcome a number of internal

demons. However one monster in particular is not only the mother of all but also the most elusive of all. I have lost many friends to this demon over the years, entrepreneurs to be, but the irony is none of them ever realised the true nature of the nemesis which slowly brought their business dreams to an end.

Sometimes I bump into old business friends and we go for a quick coffee and reminisce about the good old days, and when we discuss why their business plans never really worked out I see a look of complete incomprehension on their faces, as though they still don't know the cause of their failure. Sometimes I wonder if they do but prefer not to speak about it.

Personal demons are very difficult to eradicate because we very often actually fail to notice they are even there, and that is because the 'we' that has to do the noticing gets influenced and overtaken by subconscious and unconscious forces.

We often don't look for the root cause of our decisions and actions, and just assume it is 'we' who made those decisions and that it was 'we' who chose to behave in that particular way.

We do that by cross-checking our actions against our feelings, and if the action in question is something we want to do then we tend to think we are in total control; after all how can we not be in total control if the reason we are doing something is because we want to? Well, it's not that simple. If, for example, I were to go to the cinema and watch a vampire movie, I could say I went because I like vampire movies, and I will not have to look for any further reason to demonstrate my total control over this matter. The question could be asked though 'why do I like vampire movies?' and the reasons behind this factor will not be something I would necessarily know. The reason I like vampire movies might be some deep subconscious feeling of insecurity which we (humans) feel towards some of our planet's other animals. A feeling that could explain our attraction to beastlike humans such as vampires and werewolves, insecurity in terms of their physical ability and

power. Of course man can, and has, outsmarted the rest of the animal kingdom but if we were to come face to face with a lion, at say a distance of half a metre, the chances of our surviving its attack would be slim. Then of course we have looked up to the birds with absolute envy ever since we have been around with them. So, on a more one to one basis we do feel a lot of insecurity towards other animals, and this insecurity does manifest itself in many ways.

If this thesis were correct this subconscious feeling would be the reason why I like to watch vampire movies, but as this is not a reason I am aware of I tend to think I am in total control.

Personal reasons are the same in that they will affect our decisions and actions but we will continue thinking we are in total control and that it is 'us' who is making those decisions, when in fact there could be another underlying reason we are unaware of such as denial. This is what makes personal demons difficult to spot.

Therefore the best course of action is to remain alert and prepared so that we can spot them early enough in order to minimise the damage.

To do this we must first identify them and our best tool for uncovering these demons is to listen to our own internal voice of reason, a conversation between your 'me, myself, and I'. At first either no one wants to talk or they all start talking together, but after a while this ritual will unite all the voices and the truth will begin to unfold.

Creating a business empire from scratch and changing our financial status is a true case of David and Goliath. It is one of the bravest acts of all because you will enter into a world of something

called money which is pursued by almost every single person. You will enter into a universal competition. What is it they say? 'One in a hundred businesses make it to their second year' or 'One in a hundred survive their second year'? Either way your chances of making it against these odds are slim.

Yet, and against all the odds, some of us decide to rise to the challenge and succeed.

Bravely and selflessly we pack our bags, announce our mission and prepare to go to battle. But before we come face to face with Goliath we must get fully prepared, train ourselves, and come up with a unique strategy.

This is when we become a hero in preparation; a hero with a unique idea that others before us either failed to recognise or simply did not manage to execute properly. We have a vision that will change this history.

Others look at us with envy and our loved ones walk around proud with their heads held up high because none other than their baby brother or sister has decided to bring down the monster.

Have you ever wondered where all this courage and bravery when you start out springs from? *The 'well of possibilities'* is the answer.

Until 'tried and proven wrong' we live in the world of possibilities, and with this comes hope and invincibility. What gives us the courage is the fact that our idea and unique vision is a failure-proof theory and everything about this plan seems destined for victory in the future.

More importantly, in this world of possibility we are on our way to great achievements and our journey of success has just begun. All the sleepless nights and the budgeted life style are endured for a noble cause, waiting just a few steps away.

But be warned as this exiting notion of ‘possibility’, coupled with allowance for an ‘undecided period of preparation time’, could be a poisonous potion nurturing the roots of decay.

At some point this preparation must end and we need to take our shot at an opportunity that comes knocking at our door. The moment we have been waiting for all this time has finally arrived. But, before we open the door, fear of failure which has thus far remained silent, will start to whisper a deadly truth “what if you open the door and the opportunity you have sacrificed your life for turns out to be worthless?” or “What if you open the door too early and miss out on an even greater reward?” or “What if you open the door too late and it’s gone?”

Worst of all “What if you opened the door and there was nothing there at all?” “There is always tomorrow” says the fear of failure, “don’t rush as you still have time”. It will encourage you to accept its advice and you will be encouraged by others around you because it has only been a couple of years since you began this journey and you are still in the phase of being hailed the hero.

This is exactly why I said this demon is the most elusive of all. Because although it is a ‘fear of failure’ it will have you believe that it is the voice of ‘reason’. Good things come to those who wait, fools rush in where angels fear to tread – so you are told. You are reminded to be proud of what you have achieved so far and to remember these are still very early days. It’s all too sensible for it not to be the voice of reason.

This is the problem. It’s not the actual failing that we are trying to avoid, it’s what the failing stands for; the very fragile and unstable nature of the plan we all so devotedly believe in.

What if our plan proves to be worthless? How do we accept the emptiness of what we have worked for all these years? How do we keep on going now? We accepted this pain and suffering for all those years because there was a glimmer of paradise on the horizon.

For as long as our plan is untested we get to live a life destined for glory, and there is no feeling more powerful than knowing we are *going* to achieve something great, a feeling we are prepared to live in denial for.

But the true nature of this demon is revealed when one day you look back and realise you no longer have the luxury of saying 'I have only just launched my business' or 'I have only recently begun my business journey' or 'These are only the first two years of my business plan'.

This is when you realise you have been doing this for more than anyone around you anticipated, and if you are honest with yourself, and have the courage to face the truth, you will see this is no longer that once hailed business plan which was designed around a unique strategy and aimed at achieving a great goal. You realise that you, just like millions of others, only have a job now that helps you pay the bills.

A brutal end to the once glorious dream of an entrepreneur. Maybe now you can look back and remember all those occasions when you had the chance to take down your Goliath yet somehow managed to find an excuse to wait another day. The moment of truth came and passed while you were busy daydreaming about 'what could be' in your wonderful world of possibilities.

Maybe now you can clearly see how at times you were drawn to opportunities that created even more complications and hurdles, and how you were repelled by offers that could have saved the day.

You chose those complications so that you could have more excuses for postponing that final step.

The reason? You were scared about what would happen if you were really given the chance. If you really attempted what you had been preparing for all those years and then brutally found out the dream was actually nothing more than just a dream. You kept avoiding and postponing the final challenge in order to keep the hope alive, because that hope was the driving force behind all your efforts.

Maybe now you can look back and clearly see for the first time how as soon as you made any progress you somehow managed to throw it all away just because it was better to believe in the possibility of achieving the ultimate dream than to find out all your efforts might have been for nothing.

Being successful is about taking your shots and going for the kill when the time is right, and the most fundamental requirements for this process are the ability to face your failures and be able to get up from a defeat and try a new strategy.

What will enable you to achieve something great is not 'what' you are going to do but 'how' you are going to do it. So just because one project or business plan fails to work out doesn't mean you have lost your chance of being successful and achieving something great. There will be plenty of other ideas waiting for someone like you to get their hands on. You need to test the validity of your business plan as early as possible so that you can decide whether this plan is for you or not, and you need to accept whatever the outcome may be with an open mind and open arms, so that you can take advantage of the next potential idea or plan that comes along. The only thing you can achieve by delaying the final step is a waste of valuable time.

It's always better to know the bad news before the good.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

PRINCIPLE #3

PASSION MIGHT BE THE DRIVE BUT STRUCTURE IS THE KEY

Passion is the drive for turning an idea into a business. The passion of the entrepreneur and his/her belief in the business idea creates an unstoppable momentum that snowballs into a revolution and introduces a new concept into our everyday lives. When looking at a fully functioning business, with all its complexities and structure, we need to remember we are actually looking at a physical representation of one person's vision and dream. The process and structure through which this person's dream has become what it is, is in fact what we call a business – the structure that turns the idea into a business.

This structure, however, is often ignored or unnoticed as it gets overshadowed by the extrovert and larger-than-life personality of 'passion' and sometimes we even forget it ever existed.

When we look back at the early days of our business it may seem as though everything was magically brought together and although it was the most tiresome and painful experience of our lives, in terms of strategy and focus, it felt quite effortless. It was

as if somehow the idea of what we had to do had been inserted into our brains and each day we woke up and, without having to talk about it, just started running in the same direction, while watching each other's backs and protecting our baby. All attributed to the power of passion. Don't forget, passion also means refusal to accept defeat, and this combination with struggle for survival creates an unstoppable force, the tale of which our defeated competitors will tell for years to come. It is surprising how efficient we can be when we are passionate about what we do.

But in every business the day will come, either because the company has set out to expand or simply because its creators have become too tired, when it can no longer be maintained by me, myself, and I, and the delicate task of taking care of the business has to be delegated to new team members. And it is then that you realise the babysitter can never feel the love or the passion of the parent.

In the absence of passion your business starts to lose its momentum and all that was once effortless and magical will now begin to fall apart.

You desperately try to re-discover the magic that made it all happen in the first place but you soon realise that passion is in fact a rare commodity, which you can neither teach nor buy; you either have it or you don't.

But you need not to worry, because although *passion is the drive, structure is in fact the key.*

Maybe you weren't aware, maybe you have simply forgotten, but the fact that your company has managed to break the defences of the competition, and has successfully defended its own ground all these years, is because of a perfectly executed plan.

Although in the early days of the business the experience seemed magical, it is simply because in those days we lived

and breathed the business. We went to sleep and woke up with the thought of the business, and that meant we knew the business inside out. And with this overall detailed knowledge we knew exactly what to do, when to do it and how to do it. This combination of knowledge with passion will automatically create a perfect structure that will cater for the business's needs. Although automatic and naturally created, it is a structure nevertheless, a system that can be passed on even to the most passionless of team members.

That's right; the good news is that a revolution starts with passion but it becomes established because of a structure.

In our history there have always been men and women with dreams who have, against all odds, achieved the impossible, and yet they owe the continuity of their revolution to the structure, often implemented by their immediate followers, a structure designed to compensate for the absence of passion – as these dreamers come but once in a lifetime.

So I ask you to look back and reflect on how systematic your approach was in the early days and try to put your finger on the real essence of your success. As I am thinking about ours the hairs on my arm do the standing ovation. It truly was a well-thought-out creative approach!

No, you are not the only one who needs to dig deep to uncover the forgotten structure.

I once heard that in the eighties a team of consultants started shadowing a sales team from the Xerox company who had a proven track record in sales, so they could record at first hand the way the Xerox team sold their products. By doing this the shadowers hoped to find a systematic technique hidden in their approaches. A technique that came naturally

to the best of the best but at the same time could be executed systematically and taught to others less naturally at home with sales. What they found was a common system shared by these top sales people. In their conversations with customers the sales persons would first learn as much as possible about the products the customers were currently using. They would then try and identify any issues or problems related to those products (the shortcomings of the current products) and then point out the impact of those issues on the customer's business before finally moving on to a potential solution, which as it happened was a Xerox solution; a system which came to be known as SPIN – Situation, Problem, Impact and Need – now used by most companies in the world.¹

The lesson to be learned from the Xerox story is that there is more to success than just passion and natural flair. There is a system hidden in success, even if that system is unknown to its implementers. You need to uncover the system that was responsible for your success when you first launched your business. You might think the cause of your success was hard work, passion, and your refusal to give up, but what you may be overlooking is that what all these elements really equated to was your asking all the right questions when closing a deal. You didn't stop until you had asked all the relevant questions, and that then enabled you to qualify your leads. And, as far as your passion was concerned, what it also did was create customer confidence. That same confidence can be created in your staff by ensuring your team members always know which direction the company is taking and what is totally unique about its set-up. So upon closer inspection, what had gone unnoticed by you when you used it the first time round, becomes a visible system that others may use at a later stage in the business.

¹ Neil Rackham, author of *SPIN Selling*, is commonly believed to be the inventor of the SPIN technique and the supervisor of the above mentioned campaign.

Whatever it may have been you need to find that system and the now absent key elements that made your business the magical phenomena it once was.

You need to close your eyes and re-live the old days. You too need to shadow yourself and your original key team members but in the past, in the quest for that forgotten structure, a structure that can then be taught to your new team members.

Business commanders for a business battle

I often draw comparisons between modern day business challenges and the making of ancient empires because running a company is very much like running a country and when setting up a business you must imagine you are about to start your own empire which is both vulnerable and under constant attack.

Being an Iranian I am passionate about and fascinated by Ancient Persian history and like most Iranians I am especially fascinated by the Achaemenid Dynasty's rise and fall, as that period was the birth of one of the most influential cultures both in our history and the world's.

Everything a business man/woman needs to learn about creating, growing and maintaining a business empire is clear in the rise and the fall of the Achaemenid dynasty. However, as this is not a history essay, I am going to have to keep the history bit to a minimum and will only give you a very brief background in order to deliver the points.

This, the first world empire, was created from the dreams of one man – Cyrus the Great. Coming from a simple tribe of horsemen in the south of Persia he managed to unite all the Persian tribes and within decades created the one of the world's first empire.

At its peak the Achaemenid empire ruled over almost all of what was called by the Greeks, 'the known world', and gave

birth to the world's first multicultural state, the world's first postal service and the most efficient taxation system (under the reign of Darius the Great), plus many other achievements.

In 331 BCE the empire came to a devastating end at the hands of Alexander of Macedon and this marked the end of one of the greatest dynasties in my nation's history.

Of course every empire rises and every empire must fall but what we can learn from history can prepare us for our own future.

One man's unstoppable passion and charisma, Cyrus's, ignited the first flame of the empire. However what started as a one-man show soon became a governmental infrastructure for neighbouring countries not only to admire but to implement for themselves.

So what did we have during the reign of Cyrus, Darius I and Xerxes, that made us the greatest empire the world had ever seen? What did we lack during the reign of Darius III which resulted not only in our defeat but also a sudden end to this vast empire?

The answers to the above questions will open a treasure chest for lovers of business.

Business Commanders

Any person whose name has survived through the ages, needed loyal and competent commanders by their side. I always tell my team, as well as remind others who praise me for our modest success, that if our achievement was solely the result of my efforts then how come I was not able to get here with my previous partners and associates? Because we are only able to be the best we can be if we find the right team.

These are the business commanders; competent and loyal individuals with whose help we can create the infrastructure needed to maintain and grow our business empire.

Just as a car has certain vital needs in order to perform perfectly, a business also has certain needs that have to be

supplied. The first task of an entrepreneur is to identify these needs. The second task is to ensure these needs are provided for by allocating a Business Commander to each need. I have identified five key business needs, universal needs that apply to all types and sizes of business and, regardless of the number of your team members, you must ensure that the position of each Business Commander is delegated to someone in your team, even if it means more than one position for one individual, as small companies and start-ups often suffer from manpower issues. Even if you are starting out entirely on your own you need to make absolutely sure you fulfil these positions yourself – by doing so you will never neglect these needs.

These are the five Business Commanders:

- **Propaganda Commander** = Communicate your efforts
- **Intelligence Commander** = Know the enemy
- **Product Evaluation Commander** = Conquer people for people
- **Finance Commander** = Fund the campaign
- **Strategy Commander** = Bring it all together

Propaganda Commander – **Communicate your efforts**

Cyrus was the master of all. Cyrus had a unique vision which was to create the world's first multicultural and ethnically tolerant community. Not only did he successfully attain his goal but he did so by making sure the message of the new empire and its new king reached far distant lands by any means possible. The famous 'Cyrus Cylinder', one copy of which is currently residing at the UN's Headquarters in New York, immortalised his ambitions and efforts as the father of human rights.

Don't think for a second others are aware of what goes through your mind and what your intentions are. Our actions

seldom illustrate our intentions and many great men and women have been misunderstood during the course of history because they failed to communicate their intentions to the world. Many political parties and leaders have lost the support of the public because they failed to communicate *their* achievements and intentions.

Also be aware that others will not willingly seek to acknowledge the extent of your efforts and unless you communicate these efforts with your targeted audience they will not go out of their way to learn about how you are doing everything in your power to offer them the best possible solution.

How are our customers ever to know how passionate we are about our business, if we don't tell them? How will they ever know that we consider their happiness and satisfaction in all our actions, something almost unique in a world driven by greed and selfishness?

More important than, or at least as important as, your **actions** is the **communication of your intentions**. Communicating your sacrifices and struggles will be good for you *and* your customers.

Let me give you a few examples to put this historical essay into a business perspective. Whatever business you are in just imagine the cost base of one of your products has gone up but you have decided to keep your sales prices as they are. As far as the customer is concerned nothing has changed. Many companies are often faced with this situation and in order to keep their customers they keep the prices unchanged, in the hope that either the cost base will come down or that the other service providers will increase their prices, which would allow them to do the same.

In most cases this struggle and sacrifice is not communicated to the customer. This is a great example of how the Propaganda Commander can communicate the company's efforts. In this situation you must inform your customers that your cost base has risen but you have decided to maintain the sales price to offer them stability. How effectively you communicate this message is down to the quality of your propaganda strategy.

You must glorify your smallest efforts and make sure they don't go unnoticed because your competitors might do this first and use them against you.

These are some examples of propaganda messages we have used in our business:

“ Our weekly meetings are dedicated to finding the best possible solution for our customers. ”

“ Rest assured. Every Monday our managers get together to talk about how we can improve our products. ”

“ Our customer service centre has weekly meetings with our sales team to ensure we are not offering a product which fails to match our company's ethos of value for money. ”

You see, every company has customer service and sales managers and the like and this is a given fact and nothing new to shout about. You are supposed to have all this! However you can glorify their actions and intentions, and illustrate the human touch and passion behind the scenes.

One of the most important factors in business is the novelty factor, to which I have dedicated another section in this book. The novelty factor is the power of constantly introducing new products and concepts which will achieve three points at once:

the first is that it will keep the idea of your business fresh in the mind of the consumer as you are constantly offering something new and it gives the message you are active and that your products are not out of date or with old prices. The second point is to stop the competition from penetrating your market because your new offers and products will not give them a chance to position themselves against your changing portfolio. The third point is to breathe life, energy and hope into your own team who might have been with you all these years and may be getting tired of the same old products and campaigns.

This is the job of the Propaganda Commander. He is in charge of communicating, internally and externally, the intentions, passion, vision as well as the new campaigns of the company.

Intelligence Commander – Know the enemy

This is probably the most commonly known role and although I don't want to spend too much time re-confirming it I think by looking at a real example from history the importance of the cliché 'know your enemy' will display its full meaning.

'Intelligence' is different from having outside knowledge, it's different from having the information which your opponents put on display for you to see. Intelligence is having structural information, knowing your opponents' strengths and weaknesses. What, in fact, they will consider before their next campaign.

Cyrus accumulated as much information about his enemies as possible and his most significant victory, over the Lydian king Croesus, was the reward of his detailed knowledge of Croesus' plans and those of his allies. At the start of the winter of 546 BCE Croesus retreated to his winter camp hoping to get reinforcement from Sparta. Cyrus made a very bold

and surprising decision and chased him through the winter which resulted in a famous victory for the Persian king. The decisive factor in this victory was Cyrus' certainty of the fact that Lydia's allies would not be able to join the battle in time, because of winter and other issues which the allies were having to deal with at the time. The second factor was Cyrus' knowledge of the components of Lydia's army in Sardis which consisted of a large cavalry contingent. Cyrus changed his army's formation and placed the camels at the front of his army which disturbed the Lydian horses causing panic and breaking their formation.

Now, who is your 'Know the Enemy' commander? As soon as you become aware of the existence of a competitor you must make it your business to learn everything you can about them.

A friend of mine, whose business was in decline, asked me to put on a one-day training course for his sales team. When I met with his team I asked them to present me with an analysis of their competitor to see what we were up against. The information they gave me was the same as the information I myself had managed to gather the day before – entirely from their competitor's website and brochure, and by having bought a couple of their products.

This was not intelligence gathering. It was public knowledge. You need to know your competitor's weaknesses and strengths, such as what quality issues they have, who they are buying from, how many people they have working for them, how long it takes for them to respond to customer complaints, and so on.

With this type of information you can call a team meeting and put all the above on the table and predict what your competitor's next plan of action will be. This will enable you to launch a counterattack before they can even manage to establish their

brand in the marketplace. You need to be able to imagine what your competitor is discussing at their next team meeting, what unique selling point they will push and what weaknesses they will try to avoid.

A feeling of insecurity heightens the senses and keeps us alert, and in the beginning all businesses feel the insecurity and go that extra mile to feel safer. The fact that we are vulnerable means we are on our toes and will naturally look for this type of intelligence. Confidence, however, brings ignorance and as soon as you start to believe you are no longer in danger, or that success is your 'right', your attention will be diverted from such vital details.

You must know who your competitors are and know everything about them, their strengths as well as their weaknesses. This is the task of your Intelligence Commander.

Product Evaluation Commander – Conquer people for people

This is the one factor which is sometimes purposefully ignored as it might illustrate an initial conflict with the purpose of a business, the purpose of generating as much profit as possible for the shareholders, regardless of whether what the business is offering is actually the best possible solution for the customer.

You must always have the benefit of the customer in mind when winning them from a competitor; that is what I call conquering people for people.

Once again the magic of 'conquering people for the people' is visible in the achievements of Cyrus as he truly aimed to offer a better society and life to the conquered (this has been documented by Greek historians as well as listings of Cyrus' noble intentions in the Bible). The vision was simple; in an

era when kings were raiding and burning cities, he created a diverse empire where everyone, from every ethnic background and religion, could live in peace whilst at the same time benefiting from the support and power of the empire. The region flourished and, compared to its past, it experienced a period of peace which lasted for about 200 years. (Cyrus only exercised brutality and aggression when he was betrayed in contrast with other leaders who were brutal by nature)

From the very start and right to the end, your team members must glow with confidence in knowing that your company is the future of your industry. When speaking to new customers you must believe you are offering them what is truly their best possible option. You will know this because you know your enemies and by avoiding their shortcoming and matching their strengths you will be offering a package superior to the rest.

Why should your customers use your service? Because you work hard? Because you advertise in every possible magazine? Because you offer seven days a week customer service? Because you have dedicated account management? Or because you are the only option available?

No not at all. None of the above will do.

The customer should use your service simply because you are offering the best possible solution to **them**.

So you must know your own product better than your customers do. It does not matter what line of business you are in, you must be the most critical customer of your own company. You must experience what your customers experience from the time they

call your customer service (enter your premises) to the time they pay you and use your service, even to receiving their invoice. Only then can you decide whether you are the customer's best possible option, only when you have compared all aspects of your business with those of the competition.

During my sit-down with the sales team of my friend's company I asked them if they truly believed they were the best possible option for their customers. The answer was an immediate yes but when I asked them some specific questions they realised they no longer had the right to expect their customers to use their service.

I do understand that a balance must be kept between quality and price but more often than not businesses forget why their customers should use their service, and their efforts to cut all possible corners are often justified by the belief that 'the customers are getting what they pay for', suggesting the customers have full control and knowledge of the service they use.

Full control maybe, but 'knowledge'? I don't think so. Customers don't usually dedicate too much of their time to testing and examining all possible options before purchasing a product. Of course they do some window shopping but ultimately they put their trust in the hands of their service provider. Therefore it is our duty as a 'Service Provider' to give them the best possible package, because if you don't then it will not be long before you lose your customers to a new service provider whose intention is just that. In such a case not only will they win your customer's business but their loyalty too.

When we first launched our business in the Netherlands all we had was me running a one-man operation but trying to portray the image of an international company. So I knew straightaway our unique selling point was never going to be our sheer size and spacious office or on-the-road sales force.

I therefore made it my mission to work on the competition's weaknesses, and that weakness was price. But, as I have said elsewhere in this book 'customers won on price will be lost on price' therefore you have got to use price to drive home a much bigger message, and that message is your competitor's abuse of their customers' trust. What we decided to show to customers was not that the other service provider was just more expensive, but that they were in effect cheating them by not giving them a value-for-money service. And to illustrate that point we asked potential customers to use our free-trial package as a test platform to see what they had been losing out on all these years, even if at the end of the test they decided not to sign up with us. The word got around pretty quickly and at that point we had the competition exactly where we wanted, because if they were to react to our campaign by reducing their prices it would just prove our point that all these years they hadn't really offered their customers the best possible package. They did in fact start offering massive reductions to customers but by then customers were disappointed and angry with them. Their trust was broken, and this not only ensured we would win those customers but also stopped them from going back to their service provider any time soon.

If you are such a business and have been enjoying a period of calm and profitability, because you are operating in an industry where the other service providers share the same negligent attitude as you, then be aware that someone or some company like me might be preparing to target your customers and expose you for not looking after them all these years.

And let me assure you this is a great line to use when trying to win new customers; "All I need is a chance to illustrate to you how the company you have been using is and has been overcharging you all these years and perhaps not offering you the

quality you deserve for the price you have been paying them – I would like to offer you a free sample of our service to expose your current provider’s misuse of your trust” is my closing sentence when visiting a new client. **This is the winning line.**

The gap between what you have to offer and what the other service provider has to offer will determine who the customer will stay with. It might be a hard concept to grasp, but when speaking with a customer you must see him not as a money dispensing machine but as a person who might have a family and financial commitments, rent, rates and worries about the future of his/her business. You must see yourself as the customers’ partner and should not do business with them unless you believe you can offer them the best possible package.

Conquering people for people was a concept lost towards the end of the Achaemenid dynasty through to the reign of Darius III under whom it finally fell to Alexander. Experience and talent were no longer the prerequisites for running the empire. Instead kings and rightful heirs to the throne were being murdered by those who wished to benefit from their chosen puppet kings. It is said that much of the empire was then rebellious and dissatisfied with the government; how far from the vision of its creator.

Walk into your office tomorrow and allocate someone to be your Product Evaluation Commander. They don’t need to be passionate; they just need to compare the key elements of your business with those of your competitors and ensure your product is in fact your customers’ best possible option. This is the only way to lay the foundations of a long-term business relationship.

Finance Commander – Fund the campaign

We call it cash flow because money is like water and just like water in a garden money needs to flow between the different parts of the business to help each section grow. The job of the Finance Commander is to ensure this flow.

Just as most companies are based around the idea of a product, something they can sell to an end user, most companies also go bust because they fail to implement a reliable payment system for their customers. How soon and how easily your customers pay for your product will determine your ability to pay your business's operational costs and replace your goods sold. It is therefore your job as an entrepreneur to introduce such a simple and headache-free system to your customers, and you need to dedicate as much time to this part of the business as you do to sales and marketing, the parts that come naturally to creative individuals.

Without any doubt or debate all historians consider Darius I's ingenious financial structure to be the main cause of the empire's ability to reach the height of its power after Cyrus's death. Taxation, as a source of income for governments, had been practised in the region and other parts of the world back to the time of the first Pharaohs. However it was complicated to calculate and therefore not easy to collect. Darius created a fixed levy system which revolutionised the taxation world; they calculated a fixed amount payable by each of the empire's provinces which was based on what assets or products that province was famous for. In simple language this meant Darius's government was able to budget ahead, was able to have some idea of its future income and was thus enabled to

plan its buildings, campaigns, etc. and keep maintaining and expanding the empire. To actively make such a change meant Darius had to have understood the importance of cash flow to a greater degree than his predecessors.

Although everybody agrees that finance is the fuel of a business, we do seem to make basic mistakes when it comes to looking after our cash.

Having money doesn't mean having funds

One of the first businesses I tried was organising live music concerts in the UK, where a friend of mine and I would invite artists from the USA to put on a live show in various UK venues. The first event was the most sensitive one because we had put everything we owned into it and could not afford to lose. The doors were due to be opened to the public at 7 pm but ten minutes before my business partner rushed into the venue looking panicked and flustered, so I asked him what the matter was. He just said "I can't explain it, I need to show you the problem". He took me to the front door and opened the door just wide enough for me to stick my head out and see the lines of queuing customers stretching up to maybe 1000 meters on either side of the venue door. Jackpot! We had hit a home run. We had to turn away maybe 300 customers. A dream for any concert organiser, wouldn't you agree? Unless of course that organiser was me and my friend. The show ended and we finally got home in the early hours of the morning and started to count our takings. From the word go I realised something wasn't right. We didn't have anywhere near the amount of money we thought we would. As a matter of fact we lost over £1,000 that night.

The reason was a simple miscalculation on our part with regard to budgeting. The easiest mistake to make is to start

spending the money you have collected from customers, without having taken into account the cost of the goods sold. We were constantly collecting money from outlets that had sold our tickets so we always had money with us. This money was, of course, supposed to pay for the venue, the singers and everything else, something we knew but didn't really take seriously. Our cash flow looked so healthy and positive that we just assumed we could cover all costs.

If you have £1000 in your bank account and need to buy a pen for £1, you will just assume this is not so much of a stretch and that you can surely afford it. After all everybody needs a pen. The cash will keep flowing in and if you don't have a system in place that can tell you how much of that cash is actually yours then you will most certainly end up spending money that is not yours.

It's easy to stop major expenses because those will make us think about whether we can afford them or not. It's those small insignificant expenditures, however, that will keep accumulating without any alarm bells going off until one day you realise you have simply overspent your way to bankruptcy.

Don't encourage your customers to over-borrow

Credit makes the world of business go around and bad credit just as surely brings it to a halt. When giving credit to customers, a business will usually only consider how much credit it can afford to give based on their own credit lines from their suppliers and their own cash-flow needs. As the fight over customer ownership gets fiercer, credit sometimes becomes the bait to hook customers in, and before we know it we have created a situation where we are offering the customer a credit line bigger than they can afford to pay back.

“This is not our problem,” says the creditor, “The customers aren't children and they need to remember how much they have

borrowed and budget for paying it back” will be the business’s usual response. Unless of course the situation gets so bad that most customers can’t pay and then their cash flow dries up completely.

So really whose problem is this? The creditor’s or the debtor’s? The picture the creditors paint is of a world where the customers just borrow money they never intended to pay back in the first place, whereas, in fact, apart from a small proportion of the public, the situation is the other way around. The creditors give their customers loans and credits far beyond the customers’ means of repayment.

Money management is the responsibility of the responsible user, and it’s the bank’s job, and yours and mine, to make sure our customers are responsible and that they do have some kind of money management system in place. In most cases the customer just assumes they can pay it back and will start either investing your credit in their own business, which might never work out for them to pay you back, or they will spend it as casually as you offered it to them in the first place, never having understood the real implications of your credit line.

Of course your customers need your credit but your job is to ensure they understand what that credit is for and quantify how much credit they can afford to pay back. Create a regular payment system for them so that you are never faced with a situation where you must consider cutting them off, because then you will not only lose your credit but you will lose the customer too. After all, the reason you were offering them credit was so that they would use your services and you could profit from their payable invoices. If you suspend a client because of unpaid credit it means you will never be able to go back to that customer, which means you will lose that profit forever, because if you do go back to them it means giving them the perfect excuse for not paying you again and again.

We weren't really good at any of this at first and then a new partner joined the company. We made him our Finance Commander and have never looked back.

Someone in your organisation needs to control your cash flow, the fuel for your business, someone who can tell you at any one time how much money you have, how much credit you have and how much debt you have. There is no reason for your Finance Commander not to have this information without which you cannot and should not plan ahead.

Strategy Commander – Bring it all together

You now have the means to conquer your targeted market. What you now need is someone to process the information and bring it all together so that the company can keep going in the right direction.

This is your Strategy Commander; someone who determines the goals of the company and leads everyone in the right direction. That someone is **you**, the entrepreneur.

In the light of ever-changing circumstances, the job of a Strategy Commander is to ensure that the company reacts quickly and efficiently to keep in line with its long-term as well as its short-term plans.

So the key skill of a good Strategy Commander is the speed with which he/she is able to both process the gathered data and make decisions based on it, and this is our final lesson in learning from the rise and fall of the Persian Achaemenid Empire. In contrast to Cyrus, who as we have seen reacted to threats with exceptional speed and efficiency, the last Achaemenid king failed to recognise the extent of Alexander's intentions and instead of dealing with the problem head on he decided to write dismissive

letters to him. By the time Darius III focused his full attention on the problem Persia had already lost parts of its empire to Alexander who was of course growing in confidence. At no time during the era of the Achaemenid Dynasty had a threat of such magnitude, let alone a smaller one, been treated so slightly, or so tardily. And then it was too late.

BRING IT ALL TOGETHER

Your propaganda commander needs something to write about, your product evaluation commander can only tell you what your product is lacking and your intelligence commander can only tell you which competitor, armed with what ammunition, is lurking behind which corner and your finance commander can only tell you how stretched your cash flow is and how far behind you are with payments. But none of them are able to tell you what needs to happen next and in what order.

You need a Strategy Commander who is not only able to take the above data and turn it into an action plan but also to implement it. This is the difference between where we are and where we want to go.

Data and information tell us where we are and what we can do, but not what we should do. Imagine you and your team are in the middle of the desert. Different members of your team are equipped to tell you where you are, how much food and water you have and what threats there are around you. So, which direction should you now go in?

That depends on the short-term as well as the long-term strategy of the trip which can only be outlined by you, the leader.

The Strategy Commander's job is to have a clear vision of where the company should go and use all available data to make sure it arrives at that destination.

LEADERSHIP SKILLS

Now that you have chosen your strategy you are going to need the full commitment of your team to implement it, and to achieve this you will need to have exceptional leadership skills.

There is much that can be said about leadership skills and one can easily allocate a chapter to it, if not a book, but for the purpose of our discussion here I like to offer you this summary below:

*Having a Great Plan + Demonstrating its Achievability =
Commitment from Your Team*

Your team members want to be part of a growing business, a dynamic system that is improving all the time, a company that is always trying to be better than it was yesterday, a company that always offers them a chance to do something special. To illustrate this to them you will need to have great plans and great ideas for their implementation.

When presenting your team with these plans and ideas you must talk with absolute conviction, you must keep the focus of your presentation on the achievability of this plan and how you are going to make it work, clearly describing the steps and the path that will lead you to the end goal. You need to illustrate how 'doable' your plan is.

If you ignore the challenges of your plan your team members will think you are unrealistic. Therefore you need to mention them but easily deal with them and make them **look** simple to sort out.

This will unite your team and you will have their full commitment for your campaigns. As we said earlier it's all about the decisions you make and the speed with which you implement them, and this **speed** is very much dependent on the commitment of your team members.

This is the task of the Strategy Commander, **your task.**



GLOBAL

professional
publishing

PRINCIPLE #4

THE MOST DIFFICULT FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE IS NOT TO BUILD AN EMPIRE BUT TO RE-BUILD IT

In history there are always those who build empires, those who defend them, and others who lose them, but only a few rebuild them. But even so, this is very seldom all achieved by the same person.

When the day comes and we pack our bags ready to embark on the business journey of our lives, we may be reminded by family and friends to ask ourselves one final time 'if we are truly prepared for this challenge we have so determinedly accepted'.

But, although without hesitation or doubt our answer is yes and we can't wait to get started, we have yet to fully understand the nature of the challenge.

We have emotionally and physically totally prepared for the climb to reach the peak, assuming with absolute certainty that the peak is where the ultimate prize is.

What we fail to acknowledge to ourselves, however, is the possibility of a fall due to some unpredictable and random accident, like an earthquake, that can lead to a fall almost right

back to the starting point seconds after we have reached the top, before we have even managed to capitalize on our efforts, before we have even managed to hammer in the flag on the summit, let alone taken the prize.

This is no ordinary setback, where two or three weeks into the climb you experience a fall and have to get up, shake off the dust, and start all over again; this is a fall when we are already two or three years into the climb, making it a different kind of setback altogether, and we will look up and say to ourselves “that is where I was just a little while ago and now once again I am years away from my end goal.”

The problem is that doing such a climb all over again is a challenge actually more difficult than the initial attempt, simply because we know now that even if we do somehow manage to make it to the peak there will be no guarantees of staying on top long enough to actually claim our victory – a part of the deal we had so far ignored, taking continued success for granted.

This is what sometimes happens in business; after a few years of commitment and sacrifice we finally manage to build the empire we once dreamed of and all we need is a few years of stability for us to reap its benefits. However, due to some unpredictable and random event, our young empire experiences a rapid fall and we suddenly find ourselves back where we started all those years ago. And we come face to face with the challenge of rebuilding our empire. Of course we know that to achieve our goal we must endure the same amount of hardship all over again but this time we also know the results could once again turn out to be the same, now that we have become acquainted with the unpredictable and random factors in this business equation.

Hence this is a challenge not many are willing to take.

But let me tell you: you do not want to retire and throw in the towel without having experienced the pride, joy and magic of regaining your glory days. Let me assure you there is no feeling greater than that of rebuilding an empire you once owned, because this will probably require the most emotionally exhausting effort you have yet endured, making the triumph a truly magical experience.

However, before I identify the principles needed for overcoming this challenge we should first understand why it is harder to rebuild an empire than it is to build one.

Some people are not concerned with the emotional reasons behind our problems; they look for symptoms and figure out what the problem is, and how it effects them, and will suggest a way of fixing it, but never ask ‘why do we have these problems in the first place?’.

You can test this statement by going to your GP tomorrow and tell him/her that you are on drugs (you can always tell him it was some test you read in a book). The GP will ask you what it is that you are taking and how you are taking it, and for how long, but they will never ask ‘why are you taking it’. I can’t understand that. How can we try to help someone if we don’t know why they feel the way they do? And with that in mind I think it’s very important we acknowledge the emotional source of why we sometimes find it hard to come back from a major setback, something I hope to do in this chapter.

What happens when we lose the ‘certainty assumption’?

Losing our ‘certainty assumption’ is what makes this challenge so difficult to overcome.

When we embark on our business journey we do so to achieve a creative/financial goal and it is this goal that we call 'success'. In order to reach this we come up with a plan, a business plan that will take us from where we are to where we want to be.

The key, however, is our notion of certainty about this plan.

Every action we take in the early stages of our business is taken with conviction, a certainty that things will soon work out. It is as though we have got it all figured out and have a mental plan, a plan that outlines the steps a business must go through to achieve the intended goal. This could be as simple as renting an office space, putting together a team to sell, maintaining a product, or winning a certain number of customers. Our final picture is associated with 'success', something that will definitely, and without a doubt, materialise in a profit which will change our financial destiny. We are absolutely sure about the outcome of our plan if only we manage to perfectly execute it.

It is as though we have identified the key to success, as though we have a visual representation of success and are certain about how it can be achieved.

This is why when we think of our business we see the process in terms of a single action with a definite flow and a definite ending, an action which will develop into a certain specific shape before success starts purring in, an action just like the process of a blossoming rose bud, a single action from start to the finish. Of course there is more than one action involved in a business process but I am talking about an overall result, just as when you speed up the process of a blossoming rose bud and see how in a single action the stem shoots out of the seed, creates the leaves,

and finally grows into a beautiful rose. The business is imagined in a single fluid action that will start from a certain point and eventually grow into its final shape.

The purpose of a business too is to grow into its final shape – so the business plan is born as our mental image of how our idea (the seed) will grow into its full potential, as it does in the case of the rose.

In the beginning we all have such precise plans in mind with a clear end goal, and every step we take pushes the business towards that end goal and its final shape, a vision that includes the number of employees, a certain market share, or international points of presence, and so on, a *something* which we believe will bring about our success. ‘If we can do *this* we will definitely achieve our goal’. Just like flicking a light switch to turn on the lights, we have a visible goal which we consider to be the final step/steps before success is automatically achieved, something we must do or a position we must reach which will then automatically amount to success.

This is the essence of the certainty assumption and the key to our conviction.

Speak to budding entrepreneurs and you will find almost every single one of them has such an exact idea of what they want their business to become in time. They have an exact vision of success: the number of offices and employees, as well as market share and so on, a vivid vision of their future business empire which will without a doubt achieve the end goal. For them it’s just a matter of getting the funds to place an advert in a leading TV station, or designing some cutting-edge software, or signing up a certain number of customers in a number of countries.

Their certainty in this, leading them to their ultimate goal, is what will justify all the hardship and sacrifice which they will

have to endure for the next few years. This is the source of their unstoppable momentum.

But unfortunately growing into the perfect rose is only half the story and although our business has grown into its intended shape the end goal is possibly far from being achieved.

Sometimes, because of constantly changing conditions and unexpected events, we not only fail to reach our ultimate goal but we actually stand to lose everything we have managed to build up so far.

Everything now changes for the entrepreneur and for his/her team as the most devastating event is when a person's belief system gets shattered, a belief that had thus far explained the workings of their world, their business world in this case.

The property entrepreneur has finally reached his targeted number of properties but is suddenly faced with a sharp rise in interest rates which means he cannot maintain his newly built empire; the import-export enthusiast is suddenly hit with a 25% increase in the exchange rate which takes her margins into the negative; the software development company have managed to bring out their ultimate creation but are faced with a faster shift in the market, and are unable to capitalize on their efforts.

If any of the above had experienced any of these issues earlier on in their business journey they would have been able to recover from it, simply because in the beginning we are in a developing phase with low overheads. Once we have managed to get our business up to its intended shape, however, we will have to account for the much higher overheads that come with this structure – employees, offices, and so on – and it is such costs that can break a business in a financially difficult time.

Now we come face to face with the possibility that regardless of what we do the plan might not work out, and with such a

possibility the entrepreneur's belief system gets shattered and he or she will never again look at the business world from the same viewpoint.

The steps we once believed would bring about our success have all been taken but success is still far from our reach, in fact as far as it was when we first started, and we have lost the 'certainty assumption' that has, up to now, compensated for this painful journey.

The structure we once believed in begins to fade away. We were willing to sacrifice everything and fight for the cause, every single day, only because we believed that by winning the fight we would reach our goal.

The single action of the blossoming rose is now only half the story, the more predictable and controllable half; the half we have far more influence on. The ultimate goal, however, is something that happens in theory only if all variables work like clockwork. For the gardener, success is more than just growing the most amazing rose – it's actually getting it to the market or to the client in exchange for money, a part of the story which until now had been taken for granted. It can be an earth-shattering realization to the spirit of the entrepreneur and his/her team, because they now know there are elements out of their control which can determine the success or failure of their plan. However simple these elements may be the fact remains that they are events out of our control which can determine our destiny.

So conditions begin to exert their influence. But as I will explain shortly 'perfect conditions must be viewed as a bonus and not a necessity', because no matter how precise our planning might be there is always a part played by others whom we depend on – service providers, partners, investors and the like. There are always some factors entirely out of our control such as a global crisis, the economy, wars, and so on, factors as external to us as the weather is to the rose.

So all of a sudden there is no certainty to justify the sacrifice. Where do we now find all the energy needed not only to go through the same process all over again but to do it knowing something could always go wrong? Even if we were to relive the same challenge, how can we know it would be worth the effort and the pain? The ending is always left right open to alteration.

You are no longer able to gather your troops and inspire them to believe in you and the mission as you did the first time around. Then they absolutely believed their efforts would bring in the prize. Now that the myth has been shattered, you can hear them think “So what if we could somehow get all the customers back. We could still face another disaster” followed by “Why on earth should we put up with the sacrifice if there are no obvious signs of success?”

The conviction, which used to sit at the heart of you, the entrepreneur, and your inspired team, has been taken out of your actions.

This is the difference between building an empire and re-building it. One is based on **certainty** and the other is based on the **absence of certainty**.

These are the facts. The conviction visible in the actions of first-time entrepreneurs is due to their absolute certainty about the results. Their positive and confident approach is driven by the fact that they believe, without a shadow of a doubt, that they are about to achieve something great, and it is this promise of success that enables them to endure the sacrifice so many others refuse to accept.

However, as I have explained, for some of us this notion of certainty falls apart and as a result we lose the bounce in our step

and the excitement to have another go. How do we pick ourselves up from such a set-back and start all over again now that we know there are no certainties in business?

We need to change our understanding of success.

Success is not something we can achieve in the future, but something we must achieve every day

The first step is to understand the true nature of success.

We can't be certain of anything to do with the future, but this doesn't mean we can't achieve success.

Success is not like the rose. It's not hidden in a single action or a single challenge. Success is not about growing into a perfect shape. It's not about a perfect end result.

Success is having the best possible shape at each and every step of the way.

Conditions change which means your market will change and with it your suppliers and your customers (and of course you). Therefore your challenge is to consider the ultimate goal of your company not only in relation to a fixed point in the future but also in relation to today's ever-changing market conditions.

Whatever project you are working on you must create some value for your company today. It can't only be about the far future. You can't just put a team together whose efforts will only materialise if a certain number of customers are signed up in the next two years in order to use a specific product. You

need to ensure that at the same time you utilise this team for something that can also bring immediate returns to the company, even if smaller in value than the team's long-term purpose. This way you will at least manage to create an immediate source of income which will come in handy if unexpected conditions change tomorrow's market and affect your long-term returns. In this case not all will be lost.

Whatever you do and whichever project you work on you need to ensure you take into account both the present as well as the future market; your business needs to have both 'actual' as well as 'potential' value.

This way although your main objective is to achieve a specific goal in the future you will still be able to take advantage of any current opportunities.

So the gardener's business plan should never have been focused only on growing the perfect rose for next week's flower show. There's a chance it will never actually take place. It should have been about how he can get the best out of his rose in relation to today's market, which is changing all the time. His idea of the perfect rose was dependent on a specific market and on a number of conditions. And that means the future. A future he took for granted while he focused on the perfect rose. The gardener should also have considered how, if need be, he could sell his rose today even though it's intended for the future.

Having a long-term goal is one thing, all business plans are based on one, but to be able to get the best out of our business every day is something else entirely.

Software development companies are a good example. Of course their funding was intended to develop a specific software for the next two years or so, but you can guarantee one thing: Their idea

of what this software should be will need to change along the way, because yesterday what they thought would be a success may no longer be a hot topic tomorrow. You can't start building a fixed concept with a completion date of, let's say, two or three years from now. Well, you can try. You may decide you have created an idea that no one else will even think of for at least another five years, so you will believe two years is good enough for you to make that life-changing profit. Well, this is OK, only as long as you are prepared to wake up one day and find the industry has moved much faster than you anticipated. The best course of action, therefore, is to ensure your software can be sold for a small profit at any time during its development stage, so that it can compete with its competitors today while still being aimed at offering something completely novel in the future. Basically its future novelty cannot be its only selling point, it must also do exactly what other software does today but at a more competitive rate of course. This is the winning formula – your software now has both actual and potential value.

Equally the business plans of some companies are based around the idea of selling a specific service either at or below cost in order to attract a substantial customer base, one which they will use either as an asset for selling on their company or for creating massive buying power and reducing their cost price which will in turn create a profit. In both cases this type of business is just like the perfect rose and it's designed around the idea of a business growing into the perfect shape. However, as I explained above, if for any reason future conditions do not conform to expectations the business plan will fall flat on its face.

It's OK to have such a plan as long as some parts of your business are devoted to creating an asset that has value in today's market – **actual** value, not potential value.

This could be a unique channel to market, a specific type of customer base that is traditionally not easy to sign up, something that has an intrinsic value even if your future plans don't turn out as you once thought; something that has **actual** value today. If the **only** way for your plan to work out is for X to happen in the future then your plan only has potential value, and its potential will be realised only if X were to happen. With the method I am suggesting you will still be able to make a profit even if X does not happen because, for instance, the value of your customer base isn't in the 'how many' but in the 'type', a quality customer base that not everybody is able to attract, that has a value today.

This is having a plan that best suits the flow of a market. It's a difficult concept to explain let alone grasp but, nonetheless, it is a significant one.

It requires a mental shift from having a focused plan to having a more flexible one.

The former was based on certainty and the latter is based on its absence – as we are no longer certain of what our business will achieve in the future and will instead focus on what we can achieve at every step of the way.

So basically, you know how you are going to make money but are not sure exactly with what product, and that is because this concept called 'the perfect product' will change from one day to the next. In order to have confidence in what you are doing you no longer need to know where your production performance has to be in two years from now. Before, however, this was an absolute must, as all ideas for success were dependent on such a notion, and this notion was an image of the company which was automatically identified with the certainty of success.

You are now going to do what you do best, every single day, and turn the steering wheel when the road ahead begins to curve.

Unlike a car race where there is a clear end that marks 'success', you are now going to have to drive in an ever-changing and evolving road, without such a clear end. The challenge is to have the best possible drive at every stage of the way and each stage's requirements will be different from the next. All you need to take into account is the current goal, which is to drive efficiently and safely. Although there is no end in sight, there is one driver, who, compared to all the rest, will perform better in relation to the changing conditions of the road.

This is your task. This is how you can make your team believe in the ultimate goal, and this time around even more so than before.

No matter what stage of the business we are at, we must make sure we stay as close as possible to the ultimate goal of the business by reacting to the ever-changing environment, and as conditions change the company that best adapts to these changes will come out shining in the lead. That ultimate goal, by the way, is to make the most amount of profit with the least amount of effort in every day of our business life, not something that need be achieved only in the future.

What I have just described is in no way to suggest you should not have a business plan. All businesses must have a plan and when we start our business journey every investment we make in the beginning is made with the hope that it will bring us a return in the future. Giving free gifts, making special offers, making below cost offers and so on are all designed to get the end user's attention in the hope that after a certain trial period they will sign up to our service and become a paying customer.

All I am suggesting is that we should not have a fixed idea of success, because what would eventually bring us this success

might turn out to be an opportunity we hadn't even considered before – a result of tomorrow's surprising conditions.

Eradicate the emotional stress

There is also another reason why it's harder to rebuild an empire and that is because the second time around we know how hard the climb really is. I mean think about it. Which is worse, having your teeth pulled out without anaesthetic or having your teeth pulled out without anaesthetic **for the second time around** when we know how much it will actually hurt? When we were children we were 'brave' enough to put our hand in fire only because we had never been burned before. That is how we learnt that the nature of fire is to burn and hurt us.

During our first attempt at building the business we really didn't know how hard we would need to push as we had no idea how resistant our clients might be, how persistent the competitors would be or how stretched the cash flow would become, and so on. Every challenge had a hint of novelty to it and with that novelty came courage, because any minute the pain might end and the doors of opportunity could open.

The second time round however there is no gift of novelty. So not only is there no certainty to spur us on but on top of that we now know the exact pain we must endure as customers will always behave as customers and competitors will always be competitors – the same fight all over again.

How can we overcome this challenge, knowing the pain that awaits us, with no clear sign of success?

As I recall for us one of the effects of creating the business was the immense emotional stress that we felt at every stage of our everyday challenges. Stress related to not knowing how customers would react, for example, to our credit or payment terms (if we

asked them to prepay perhaps or if we refused large credit terms), or how long we would have to wait before the customers decided they would sign up to our service. Let's not forget too the stress of losing a customer to our competitors. Not to mention the stress related to not knowing how customers would react to our service issues – and all the other things that come as part and parcel of the business journey.

Back in the day we lived and breathed the business and our minds were 100% focused on its growth and shape. As a customer was taking his/her time thinking about our offer, we too thought about what his/her decision might be. While a customer of ours was trying another service provider's offer, we couldn't stop thinking about how their offer might compare to ours. And, of course, figuring out how many 'left messages' or 'call attempts' are too many when chasing a 'should pay' customer. This is the level of emotional commitment and involvement that is required in the empire-building phase.

But knowing the extent of the pain that awaits us is in a way a blessing, as at least we now know it can't get any worse and knowing its limits should mean we can prepare for them.

Being anxious is not a necessity; it's simply a side effect of not knowing the result.

Having already gone through this process means there will be fewer surprises and fewer disappointments. Maybe now we can eradicate the emotional stress that we initially experienced due to the novelty of the challenge. Stress that was the result of not knowing the extent of the problem, an emotional stress related not to the problem itself but to how long the problem would last.

The second time around, however, there is no such mystery, not as much as the first anyway. This should make the rebuilding challenge somewhat easier.

Before you mistake what I say with ‘not caring’, let me emphasise something: you would still need to go through every single step with as much passion as possible, react to customer’s needs as quickly as possible, and win them back as aggressively as before, but the difference is that you don’t need to be, and shouldn’t be, as *anxious* as you were before.

The anxiety needs to be eradicated but the actions will need to be repeated; basically you shouldn’t worry because being worried has no intrinsic value.

This is emotional detachment which will work.

You can now begin the psychological warfare with your competitors, for whom the novelty of this business experience still brings this emotional stress. Something only you can eradicate just because you have experienced it already. For your competitors the emotional stress is an open-ended road with no clear end in sight. ‘How much more of this exhausting challenge must I endure?’ he will ask. A worry you and your team can now capitalize on.¹

So we have unveiled the demon; maybe now we are able to have another go, now that we know the cause of our emotional disturbance in the face of this problem.

Perfect conditions are not a ‘must’ but an ‘added bonus’

A common mistake made by many entrepreneurs is that they build their empire on a perfection-dependent foundation. By this I mean their dreams will certainly come through if only everything works out perfectly – customers will pay on time, suppliers will deliver what they promise and the designer will finish the poster within the agreed time frame.

1 Refer to psychological warfare on page 153

Their initial profit and loss calculation, on which their dreams were built, is perhaps based on a simple mathematical calculation on Excel, where they take their 'would-be' costs away from their 'would-be' sales to disclose that life-changing profit, and hope that this can be sustained for X number of years until they make their first million.

A business cannot be built on the idea of perfection.

If a possible error threatens the chances of success, then be sure that you are doomed to fail. Because with business, much like everything else in life, there will be conditions and variables outside of your control, and with that in mind you **must** allow room for error. Everyone knows mistakes happen so the question is not whether you will be forgiven for them but whether you can **pay** for them.

Paying for your own or other people's mistakes has many facets. You either pay by extra marketing or by offering rock-bottom prices to maintain unhappy customers, or simply by losing the business of the disappointed customer to a competitor and having to face winning them back all over again, all of which, I bet, you did not factor in when you did your initial profit forecast.

Having experienced the first financial setback is the true making of an entrepreneur. Because to make our dreams come true we first need to wake up.

When your business plan has taken into account the possibility of errors and mistakes, and still forecasts a profit, then you know you have got a winning formula. And the only way you will ever truly know what it will take to make your financial dreams come true is to experience the imperfect conditions you once thought you could control.

So basically we should welcome such setbacks as it's through them that we learn what we really have to do in order to achieve our 'success'; setbacks highlight weaknesses and point them out to us, and all we have got to do the second time around is to take into account the imperfect nature of our business plan.

Of course in some cases future conditions just happen to work out perfectly, and when they do we will get the break of a lifetime, but the fact remains that a business cannot be built around the **hope** of perfect conditions. I am not taking anything away from those whose two- or three-year business plans have achieved their intended goals. A lot has to be credited to their clever planning and market awareness, but the point stands that nobody can be absolutely certain of future conditions and therefore we cannot put all our eggs in tomorrow's basket.

You get knocked down by hard reality but you have to stand up and reformulate your approach. This is now your first proper shot at the title.

Embrace the four seasons of your business

A business is like a garden and the entrepreneur is the gardener. You must embrace the seasons as each season will unveil different characteristics of your business and you.

This I believe is where the notion 'seasoned' comes from when used as an adjective to describe an experienced person. A person who has witnessed and lived through all the seasons. Well, this is my explanation of it anyway!

What you have when everything is going well is the spring and summer of your business. You are a gardener enjoying the flourishing and blossoming of spring and summer. The only thing you know and are prepared for is the perfect seasons for growth.

You see, if you walk into a garden, in the beautiful season of summer, you will witness some of the most beautiful flowers with colourful arrangements, and you may walk up to the gardener to pat him on the back for a job well done. But don't forget, there is a fine line between a 'job well done' and a job finished and proclaiming him 'the best gardener of the year'.

Because then come the cold, stormy seasons of autumn and winter. The only difference between a business and a garden is that in a garden seasons follow one another in a predictable routine, but in business they can come at different times and in different orders.

Because the summer will soon pass and one day autumn and winter will come to the garden, bringing cold and storm. How the gardener deals with the problems of winter is what he will be remembered for.

Everything and everyone will behave differently under these conditions and these circumstance offer you the insight into how your plants and flowers will behave under harsher conditions. You as a gardener will be challenged to act quickly and efficiently to save your garden.

During the cold and stormy season of winter you will, for the first time, get to know the true nature of everyone and everything involved in your business.

This is how you will know the true cost of your business and how long it will take you to reach your financial dream.

What about those who were lucky enough to reach their dreams during the spring? Who cares if the gardener can stand the test of winter if he has already managed to sell his garden to the highest bidder during the spring?

Maybe so, but envy not my friend as winter's coming is only a matter of time, and for those who have managed to escape its claws so far, winter will hit them twice as hard. They will be unprepared for winter's arrival.

Life is a hustler, and if you don't have your wits about you it will draw you into a con you might not be able to recover from.

An early, easy and smooth succession to glory will only grow the appetite for something bigger and better. Life will sucker you into a false sense of security and arrogance, where you will take all your earlier lucky wins, plus the life savings of a few others, and put them all on the line – because spring is all that you know. This is when the long overdue winter of your life will finally arrive and you, the unseasoned gardener, will not be able to cope because you are now in charge of the Garden of Eden and God wants the return on his investment now.

There is no escape from winter I promise you. It's better to have it early on when you only stand to lose sleep for a couple of years, than later, when you may lose an empire and never sleep again.

It's easy to preach positive mental attitudes when you are not facing disaster directly before your eyes. Well in my case I am telling you all the above while facing one of the coldest winters, and one reason for telling you all this is because I am actually saying it to myself. In the midst of confusion and panic I can lose sight of these business principles too and by writing them I am actually reminding myself that the coming of this winter is actually a blessing and not a total disaster.

Very early on in our business we got extremely close to getting £500K funding from a venture capitalist to kick start what was then an infant business. I didn't go looking for investment and this opportunity came about through someone we knew. Nevertheless due to certain circumstance (the private equity firm running out of funds) the deal never went through and instead my computer and I had to go it alone from the sitting room in my flat.

When I look back at those days, I can't quite understand

myself and how I thought the funding was going to help. I was an unseasoned gardener and if we had got that money I would have definitely run it into the ground in no time, with less to show for it than I do now, as whatever would have survived would have been torn to pieces by hungry shareholders.

When your business experiences its winter it means you have to find the best possible help for the least amount of money and this process will make you the master of bargain hunting in the world of business, a critical asset for running a business.

I now know the true value of a pound, not because of what it can buy but because of how hard it has been to earn it.

You can lose faith in everything else but not in yourself

“I think therefore I am”, beautifully put by Descartes, is a reminder that although it’s possible for everything else not to exist I can at least be sure of one entity’s existence, and that entity is ‘me’.

A similar rule applies in business.

“ You might have lost your certainty about everything else but the one thing you can be absolutely certain of is your own ability and dedication.”

As I mentioned before we can lose our faith in business after experiencing set-backs and we will no longer be sure about anything unless it actually happens. We no longer believe good ideas and perfect planning will ‘definitely’ lead to success because now we know there are some factors always out of our control which could always go wrong.

However there is one thing you can still be absolutely certain of and that is 'yourself' and your ability to achieve something great. This is all the certainty you are going to need when all else fails. Your dedication and absolute commitment, plus your work ethic and analytical approach, are the only assets you can definitely count on.

This alone, you should know, will take you to success, because although your business plan might not have worked out the first time around you can find comfort in knowing that your competitors may have suffered from the same kind of setbacks. Now it comes down to who refuses to give up first.

It is this self belief that will come to your rescue when you are trying to inspire your momentarily defeated team. To them the impossible has happened – the unimaginable has become real. What they were absolutely certain of has proven to be vulnerable and questionable. What they were so devoted to is now shattered, and the only natural course of action seems to be to let nature take its course and stop pursuing an idea that they are no longer sure of.

It is then that you must remember this principle and take on the most critical task of your business career; it is then that you must show your team how you are able and willing to keep the company from falling to pieces. All that matters at this stage is that you are capable of bringing in a few deals that could be the start of a potentially new journey, something that demonstrates you still believe in the business and its goals.

You need to start re-building your business empire with a new source of energy which, unlike before, is not based on knowing exactly how things will work out but based on the certainty that your dedication will lead you to something great. And this is all your team needs to witness in order for them to believe victory will be theirs one day.

SUPPLEMENT #1

AN EXPERIMENT IN RELATION TO 'WORRYING'

In order to create a business from scratch one must overcome a number of physical and mental challenges, and it's the mental ones that most of us struggle with. How we think and what we think about will pretty much dictate the outcome of our business challenges, and for that we are going to have to train ourselves not to lose focus and not to get distracted.

Worrying, for example, is one such mental process that adds very little value to business challenges as most of the time getting worried alone cannot resolve a problem. Worrying is not a useful approach to problem solving and it is not a logical approach to the issues; it is simply a mental process that takes over our thoughts without adding any tangible or measurable results.

'Worrying' is when we are at the mercy of constantly thinking about the negative possible outcome of an event because we cannot take control of what we think about. We therefore think 'worrying' is natural and unavoidable, and as far as others who have the ability not to worry are concerned we just assume they are not as worried about the results as we are.

What we need to realise, first, is that worrying is a mental process and something we think about, and second the fact that we can be in total control of the things we think about. In fact we can control our worrying.

Let me draw your attention to a simple experiment that does demonstrate this simple truth.

Have you ever noticed how all of a sudden you start to hear the ticking sound of a clock, which has been sitting on your sitting room wall for a very long time? It's as if the clock has just started ticking, tick-tock, tick-tock, tick-tock.....

The more you think about this ticking sound the louder it becomes, TICK-TOCK, TICK, TOCK, TICK-TOCK... until, of course, the only noise you can hear is the ticking sound, Clunk, Clunk, Clunk.... This is pretty loud; I mean it's disturbingly loud. How on earth did I not hear this when I first came into the room?

And as I am thinking about the strangeness of this incident, the fact that the more I think about the sound the louder it becomes, I suddenly start to notice how gradually this annoying sound is beginning to fade a way. I can still hear it but it is much quieter, and it keeps getting fainter and fainter, tick-tock, tick tock, tick-tock.

And so I understand; what I hear is not compulsory and out of my control, but it is just another subject of my thoughts and no different from any other subject, a subject that can be changed as I begin to think about something else. So basically the noises we hear are no different from any memories we might find ourselves thinking about incessantly (in that they are all just thoughts).

The more I focus my thoughts on the ticking noise, the louder and more important it becomes, and the more I shift my focus from it, by thinking about how the noise is nothing more than a thought, the quieter it becomes. The same thing happens to the new topic which is now replacing thinking about the ticking noise. The ticking sound will at first prove too dominant to ignore and it will be difficult not to think of, but all I need to do is to start thinking about something else and as this new thought begins to develop it will soon start to replace the ticking sound. It could be any thought as long as it has the potential to be developed and followed through, taking us on a mental train ride as we begin to uncover the facts about whatever it is that we are thinking of, taking us further and further away from that noise.

Let me give you an example of a developing thought. How would I know if my experience of the colour red is the same as yours or everyone else's? How can I be sure, when looking at a table, for example, that we are both seeing it in the same colour, let's say red? I mean how would I know if by red you actually mean the colour sensation that I am experiencing? What you are calling red might be, in fact, green, or the other way around, and I would never know, because if I was to point to something red and ask you what colour you saw, you could still say red but would in fact be seeing green, thinking that is what others call it when addressing this colour sensation (meaning green). I would have no way of seeing the world through your eyes to see exactly what you see, so perhaps we all see things differently and will never know either way.

You see, I bet you haven't heard the ticking noise while thinking about the invisible difference between green

and red. You didn't even shift your focus for a second as you were engrossed in developing the above thought. Of course all thoughts are developing but the reason I am mentioning it is to draw special attention to the fact that the developing aspect of a thought is what will enable us to become engrossed in it and forget all about the sound of the ticking clock. You can think about anything you want as long as you start to uncover the truth about the subject of your thought, and by that I mean not taking anything at face value and analysing our most obvious and basic beliefs, which will in turn create a new viewpoint for us to develop and follow. It is through this process of 'thought development' that one will stop hearing the ticking sound of the clock.

In summary: not hearing a sound in the background, such as the sound of a clock or a fridge, or having it replaced by another thought, isn't something that can only be achieved involuntarily and as time passes (as it does when we first hear the sound of a fridge being switched on and then as time passes we just don't hear it anymore). It can actually be done consciously and purposefully as we shift our focus to a new thought and follow its development through, step by step.

With that in mind what I hope you have taken from this section is that you can be in total control of what you think about, and when it comes to facing business challenges you must exercise this control and focus all your efforts and thought processes on resolving them, and not waste your valuable time by allowing yourself to worry about them.

Whenever you find yourself helplessly entangled in worry just remember the sound of the ticking clock and try to take control of the sounds you can hear, a process through which you will remind yourself of the amount of control you actually have over what you can think about. And through the self-reminder of this simple truth you will be able to detach yourself from 'worry' and think about more useful and productive topics.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

KNOWLEDGE IS NOT A SECRET BUT A CONCLUSION – ‘THE LEGEND OF THE BOOK OF ANSWERS’

My intention with this book is to talk to you about real and common business challenges and turn you into a true business gladiator so that when you are faced with such questions or challenges you can overcome them by remembering these principles, principles I discovered when no one else could give me the answers. From all business decisions and conundrums the one below is one which I have had to face on more than one occasion, one which all entrepreneurs must face at one time or another. As a matter of fact I am facing it as I write this section of my book.

With all its beauty and creativity, a business is a system created around a concept that depends on the flow of money for its survival. This makes business the most competitive activity in the

world because money is something everybody needs; so to be an entrepreneur one will need to enter into this universal competition for money. (Not so long ago I wanted to be the best painter and the most renowned philosopher in the world but only recently have I learnt the true meaning of competition because for once I now want something that almost every other person wants too.)

You are not the only one who wants your customer's money; your competitors, as well as other businesses, want your customer's money too so the key for remaining in this market is to expand your customer base and so expand the sources of your income.

Most often businesses are stuck in a local fight because their home is their comfort zone, but there are only so many customers you can win while standing still, either in the same place or in the same position; the business dreams of many budding entrepreneurs die while they watch their customer base shrink around them either because there is too much competition or because those customers are pulled towards newer and better technology.

Sooner or later you realise you are going to have to move into new territories, either by changing and adding to your line of business or by entering a foreign territory, and when thinking about this completely new venture we come face to face with one of the most difficult challenges of our business life – the challenge and the fear of the unknown, initiated by the question of 'where do I start from?', the question that holds back millions from trying, and separates entrepreneurs from wannabes.

How many business men/woman do you know who are prepared to change their line of business? By change I don't mean 'trying a little bit of this every now and then' and 'doing a bit of that'. What I actually mean is to create a business system that is devoted to this new line. How many do you know who are prepared to expand into foreign territories and set up camp in

a different country. Again I am talking about a fully functioning structure? In both cases the answer is not many.

Even you! How many times have you thought of changing your line of business before deciding it was better to stick to what you knew best although what you knew wasn't offering you the reward you had initially planned for? How many times have you blamed your starting point for where you are now; the fact that you chose the wrong line of business to begin with and now it's too late to change? Do you wish you were able to set up camp in other countries and double your turnover, or wish you could get involved in one of today's less saturated industries and move with the times? Yet every single time you are faced with the question 'where would I start', faced with the great unknown and its associated risks.

All we can think about is all the things we don't know about this new venture and all the things that could go wrong. If only somehow we could be told exactly what to do?

If only someone was able and willing to give us the answers, the secrets to this challenge, without which we will surely fail.

We feel this way because when considering a new business venture we tend to focus on the end product, a fully functioning business, and as a result we are faced with the overwhelming complexity of such a complicated structure, with all the things this business must do. For example, if I was to change my line of business and open a restaurant I would need to make sure I got the location right. This is key. I would also need to make sure what type of food would sell in this location and how I should price it. Then of course I am going to need a head chef, but how would I be able to judge the quality of his work if I have no experience in cooking? And the same applies to everything else down to waiters and so on. And as slowly as these thoughts run through our mind we begin to

turn against this new challenge and return to what we know best. Unless of course we could team up with someone who has the extensive experience and knowledge we lack.

This is a daunting challenge, one which I had to face when I decided to expand our business into Europe; and without anyone to give me the answers I reminded myself of the source of my fears and started to understand it. Below is what I found.

The legend of the ‘Book of Answers’ – The weight of fear

I often construct stories through which I convey my messages and hopefully inspire my team and partners, and just before I made a final decision to expand into the Netherlands and open a company there I e-mailed the story below to my team and our suppliers. This realisation for me was key in making the decision for going international. As a matter of fact this concept has become my most influential companion for taking steps into other unfamiliar territories, such as Portugal, Spain and France; I hope it serves the same purpose for you.

A very small philosophy school in China is losing students to new and upcoming schools in the country. In order to secure their future the head of the school is forced to consider opening up other branches outside China. So he decides to open up a second school in India in order to benefit from its growing population of philosophy students. His biggest worry and concern is that none of his staff has ever been to India before and none of them has any idea how to go about setting up a school there. They have only raised a very small fund and they have to consider the risk of taking this fund and using it to set up in India which could offer them the big return they so desperately need or alternatively could be a failure which would lose them the last of their capital.

The head of the school gathers everyone for a meeting and explains the situation, the risks and the rewards. However they are not able to make a decision because this is a completely new territory to them and poses a lot of new challenges. Therefore they decide to consult the wise man of their village and ask for his guidance. They sit with the wise man and tell him their plans and explain how they are concerned about how little they know about India so that they don't even know where to start. They tell the wise man that opening a school in India means they will need to know the rules, regulations, location, building the school, finding the workforce, and so on and so forth. They don't have the knowledge to resolve these concerns and requirements and are not sure if this is a risk they should take.

The wise man tells the head of the school "I have never been to India myself but I think I might be able to help you." He tells them of a book, in a very far and remote library in India, called 'The Book of Answers' which has the answers to all the questions regarding anything and everything relating to India, including the setting up of a philosophy school in India, written specially for people who have schools in China, just like them. Therefore if they were to get that book they would be able to get the answers to their specific questions and they would know India as well as those who live there.

Of course with this type of knowledge they could set up the school and minimise the risks involved. The wise man tells the head of the school "all I can tell you is that the book is called the 'Book of Answers' and that it's in a library in the south of India". He continues "I am not able to help you any further and I don't even know how you can get there and what the locals might call this book, but all you need to do is find this library and find this book, and once you have found it and got your answers you must put it back in exactly the same place so

that others can benefit from it.” The head of the school thanks the wise man and prepares for his trip to India to find ‘The Book of Answers’ with all the solutions to their problems.

He leaves for India and travels from one village to the next and it takes him many painful weeks to finally find this remote library in the south of India and ‘The Book of Answers’.

The moment of truth has arrived. He takes a deep breath, closes his eyes and pauses for a moment before nervously opening the book, only to see that all the pages are blank and that on the last page there is written: ‘Now you Know’.

He is angry, frustrated and disappointed to have listened to the wise man’s advice and to have travelled for so long and to have spent so much money to get here only to find a book with blank pages. He puts the book back and returns home.

When he finally gets back home he delivers the disappointing news. He gathers everyone including the wise man and tells them about his unexpected find. They are now in a worse situation than before because of the expenses of the trip. The members begin to voice their concerns and someone shouts out “We really needed that book to have the answers otherwise how do we even decide the location of the school in such a huge country?” Another member says “What about the set-up procedure?” but just before the next person begins to speak the head of the school interrupts, “Actually I don’t think that is too much of a problem because in my search for the book I passed through many towns and talked to a lot of people. In one town in particular they were very fond of Chinese philosophy which would make it a possible location for us, and another time I met a man who had previously set up some kind of school in India and offered his help if we needed it.” All of a sudden the mood begins to change because they realise that the head’s experience from this trip might be all they need to start this venture.

He then approaches the wise man and thanks him for his help and says:

“ Now I understand the legend of the Book of Answers. The setting up of a business in India was a frightening task because we kept focusing on the end result with all its risks and possible failures, but the search for the Book of Answers was a fearless task all because it carried a promise of certain success at its end, helping me to look at individual challenges individually.

During my quest for the ‘Book of Answers’ I have actually learned a lot about India. Travelling from one side of India to the other meant I had to overcome many challenges and I managed to overcome them because I faced them one challenge at a time. I met a lot of people from different backgrounds whom I can use to set up the schools. I now know a lot about the cultural differences and different philosophies practised by different communities and overall I feel more comfortable and confident about opening the school in India. I even have an idea on where to open the school because I have travelled through India.”

The moral of the story is threefold:

FIRST, KNOWLEDGE IS NOT A SECRET BUT A CONCLUSION

We keep thinking the knowledge of setting up a business in another country or changing our line of business is like a secret that only those with experience know, and we keep looking for someone or some book to give us this secret. However what we must realise is that knowledge is not a secret but a conclusion.

Let's not forget that all complicated things in life are made up of simpler components. Sometimes when faced with completely new challenges we become overwhelmed by their complexity and are discouraged by all the things we don't know about the challenge. We therefore tend to think that finding the answer might be too difficult for us to achieve when in fact all we need to do is look at what it's made of.

All we have to do is to familiarise ourselves with a few components of the task, any components, and use them as the starting point of our search and these components will reveal the other components that they are connected to, or depend on, and thus a complete picture will begin to emerge and from our understanding of these components we will arrive at a conclusion of what we must do and how we must do it. This conclusion is the answer we were looking for.

SECONDLY, MORE THAN ONE ROAD WILL LEAD TO YOUR HOME

True, some roads are quicker but it's better to get home late rather than never to get home at all. Sometimes we look for perfection or are put off by its absence. It's as if we need to know exactly what to do in order to be successful or that we need to do things in a specific way. It's true that to set up a business overseas one must overcome many hurdles. Knowing the order in which to approach these hurdles as well as having the 'know how' will, of course, be valuable but it's not essential.

Our challenge is not to launch a perfect business abroad (or a new line) but to launch a business and create opportunities for our company. Just remember that there is more than one path to every destination unless of course the destination is the path. In the case of business ventures there certainly are many paths and all you need to do is to start your journey from one known location and you will soon find the links that will lead you to your objective. We

do it all the time when going on trips (when we don't know how we should get to a place) but we forget this simple rule when it comes to a much bigger challenge and become fully dependent on having the perfect route map.

THIRD AND MOST ELUSIVE OF ALL IS THE ADDED WEIGHT OF FEAR

We not only view the challenge as a whole but we become afraid of the unknown and the possibility of failure, with its emotional and financial impacts. All of a sudden the question of 'where do we start?' becomes the reason for our decision not to go ahead. However when we tackle the challenge from a research perspective or one challenge at a time, without focusing on the scale of the challenge as a whole, we become more fearless and the challenge becomes lighter.

Detach yourself and the individual challenges from the end goal

We had a lot of questions when we thought about launching our business in Europe (legal set-up, bank accounts, collection, sales force, customer service, competitor analysis and technical requirements) so we decided to forget about all these and make it our quest to find out what software our potential clients used and in doing so we somehow managed to find the contacts necessary to help us with the rest of the issues and slowly we were able to paint a complete picture and answer most questions.

There is no book of answers and even if it did exist I certainly would not recommend it to anyone as a guide, because being told the answer is not the same as searching for it.

The secret of reaching the truth is in the journey.

If your organisation has the funds I would urge you to send your team members on a small building construction exercise as this training brings home this message.

Tackling a project one challenge at a time is most obvious in the construction business – anything from building a house to renovating one. When you compare the end result with what you had before you started the difference is enormous, and to many it can seem impossible to achieve. But in reality it's a simple case of one brick at a time.

Of course the project manager ensures that every brick is laid to achieve the agreed end result but that end result is not contemplated with the laying of every brick, otherwise the task would appear far too difficult to achieve. You can't keep wondering how far you are from having a completed house. You just need to focus on one task, one brick, at a time.

Send your team on such a project, even if it's a simple renovation project, where they can learn how to put aside their fears of the unknown and the complicated. It truly requires patience and mastery of nerves to walk into a derelict house and be able to choose a starting point which will one day lead you to an unrecognisable site. If only our builder friends appreciated the talent they so often take for granted!

Taking the international step

I don't mean to turn this into a personal story telling or boast about my own achievements. My intention in drawing on personal experiences is simply to illustrate the validity and the effectiveness of the principles in question. Today as I am writing this section of the book we have our second office in the Netherlands and product lines in Portugal, Spain, France and Italy, all initiated by a vision that I had not so long ago following the steps which I am recommending to you in this book.

After convincing myself to expand our business into Europe I decided to have a meeting with myself and come up with a mental plan.

Although I have said before that the entrepreneur is gifted with the talent of visualising the next step and therefore breaking down the great unknown into smaller bite size challenges¹, when it came to this task, I genuinely had no idea where to start. I mean really where do you start with a project so alien and so unpredictable?

All I could do, when thinking about the challenge of launching the business outside of the UK, was to try to visualise the steps we took in the UK for building our brand and targeting the customers, and hope to do the same again. I used to reminisce about the good old days, when Jenna and I gave this project more than anyone else was willing to give. (Jenna was my first key team member.) I remembered how we focused on what we had and tried to ignore what we did not have. Well, this has always been our philosophy. Of course we thought about what we did not have, but rather than keeping that as the focus of our business plan we actually brought what we had to the forefront of our minds and, to compensate for what we didn't have, we made sure we utilised what we had to its fullest potential. And one thing we certainly had was absolute determination to establish our name in the market, raw passion for what we offered to the customers as well as faith and 24 hours' work in every day. With that in mind, Jenna and I started to utilise the greatest gift of all, our gift of the gab.

Well, as far as Jenna's talent is concerned, when she was little, an only child, she found a way of keeping herself busy and occupied by going up to her father's study, going through the yellow pages and randomly telephoning unsuspecting residents of Windsor, to whom she sold and arranged the

1 Look at 'structural vision' on page 12.

delivery of, imaginary carpets. Although her wanting to have a little company is forgivable, I do, of course, apologise, on behalf of Jenna, to all those residents of area code 01753, who never actually received their carpets. She truly did have a magical way about her when talking to customers, be it over the phone or face to face. In the early days, we used to have a service where our customers could call overseas at a much cheaper rate compared to major service providers and Jenna's first job in our company was to ensure these customers remained loyal to us and did not switch to a cheaper competitor. I gave her a list of these customers and a few weeks later she presented me with a colour coded chart, some of which stood for 'customers who had gone to Iran for holiday'. She had actually spoken to them while they were on holiday, found out when they were coming back and had allocated ten minutes of free call time to them, as a welcome back bonus, for when they got back. I knew there and then that our luck was about to change.

And as for me, well, I have always been in sales, but having worked in London's Camden Town, and survived, was like my graduation certificate in sales. That was one tough environment. Although Camden High Street was then famous as the leather garment centre of London, the problem was that all the shops sold exactly the same garments and I mean the exact same, even down to the same labels from the same wholesalers. This is what you call a competitive market and, if you weren't careful, the only winners would have turned out to be the 'spoilt for choice' customers, as 'hungry for sale' shopkeepers offered reduction upon reduction to snatch a sale. I quickly realised there was no point in competing on price because that would have meant I was selling exactly the same jacket as our neighbouring competitors, with the price as the

only differentiator. With that in mind I made it my mission to stick to our original price and create a doubt in the shoppers' mind as to which garment was the real deal and which would stand the risk of coming apart on the next rainy day. The sales guys from the shop opposite, and the shops next door, would all watch in defeat as I began to sell to their customers. In one instance the couple kept walking to the shop opposite and then back to ours, maybe six times, before ending up buying from me. The poor sales guy would keep following them out of the shop and half way cross the road, with the jacket in his hand, shouting "Maam, swear to God, this is the same jacket, look at it, it's bloody the same, and you are about to pay more for it." I found that clients were prepared to pay a little more if they believed they were paying for quality.

Being able to sell was our greatest asset.

As I have said there are two different types of company in the market: there are those who sell a perfect product and those who perfectly sell a product; we were and are the latter type.

Having started with next to no capital meant I started my business journey by taking a simple and common product which we sold and supported better than our competitors.

We sold ourselves, the company ethos, and the product perfectly. That was achieved by communication. But before we could utilise this great asset abroad we had to overcome a more basic and fundamental hurdle and that was the choosing of targeted countries for launching our business.

All you know is that you want to expand your business abroad, not only to expand your customer base and increase your revenue but also to benefit from other unexpected opportunities specific to that country which you would be more confident

to take part in if you actually had an active business there. Opportunities in the housing market for example. Therefore every part of your reasoning is telling you to move abroad, but the world is a big place with many countries, some better than others for your business. You have little idea where you should start to look. How do you choose from this global marketplace?

Instead of thinking about the project as a whole – a fully functioning business with all its associated risks and fears – I decided to focus on one particular challenge for the time being – identifying a suitable country – and treat that as a project on its own. This became the starting point which was to lead me to my destination.

So how do you make the initial selection?

The foundation of any expansion campaign is built on the fact that you should not adopt a perfectionist approach and by that I mean trying to take on a global challenge and making sure you have picked absolutely the best market in the world, from all available markets, for your line of business, for all time.

There is always a chance that there is another marketplace thriving more than the one you have picked, but this should not be a reason for not trying. You can't keep telling yourself "what if I am choosing the wrong country" and "there might be another country more profitable than this one." Your aim should not be to pick the best ever opportunity; your challenge is to pick a good opportunity; your challenge is to narrow the global market down to a few choices and then try to choose the best one/ones *for you* from that selection.

So, how do you narrow down the global challenge to a few countries in order to investigate them and choose from them? How can we go international?

Your strengths and weaknesses are key to this question. I knew I wanted to launch retail telephony services in other

countries but where should I start? At this point, regardless of what your project is, you must think about what you do not have, which in our case was a lot of money which meant we could not stay away for a long time to investigate the market, we could not hire professional advice in legal matters and company set-up, and finally whichever country we chose we could barely afford up-front costs such as office space, etc.

These were the things we did not have and for any other person in my situation these would have been good enough reasons not to proceed any further. However, as I have said before, never let the things you don't have keep you back. Always utilise, to the best of your ability, what you do have.

In our case we looked at our supplier's strengths and began our European adventure by choosing the countries they had an office in. Maybe we didn't have all the above but we realised our suppliers did so we decided that if we were to utilise their office space this would eliminate a lot of difficulties for us and we would not have to deal with the costly and complicated and, most importantly, long-term commitment complications which come with renting an office. Also this would give us local presence in the eyes of potential customers and future employees when meeting them in those countries. In this way we could attract the type of people we needed at this early stage. Our supplier's team in those countries could then play an important role in introducing us to this completely alien market and be our initial guide even if it meant learning the most basic things from them.

With this in mind we started to utilise our sales skills and presented our suppliers with an offer they couldn't refuse. The summary of the proposal was that if our suppliers helped us in our European venture they would in effect be helping us to expand our customer base which would mean our buying more from them. This created a unique opportunity for both of us because our suppliers did not have a direct sales force in their European

offices and they used them mainly for wholesale purposes. With our proposal they saw for the first time a chance for closing the gap between their services and the end users' through an allocated retail channel which they could work with very closely.

So one tick in the box. If we could convince our suppliers to give us minimal office space in every country they had a presence in, it meant we could more or less start our project.

We did not make our decision based on the best marketplace. I didn't know where in the world was the best marketplace for our products and whether we were about to launch in a country which was at its peak or less saturated than the rest. It might have been Nepal or maybe the UAE. We made our decision based on where we could actually launch with minimal investment and create an additional revenue stream for our company as efficiently as possible; if we had adopted a perfectionist approach we would probably still be investigating and searching for the world's most lucrative market.

I say it again; the global market is a big place and your challenge should not be to choose the most lucrative market but to grow outside of your current marketplace and find a country where you can successfully and efficiently add revenue to your company. You cannot keep comparing what you might make in Italy, for example, to what you may make in Nepal, simply because expanding to Nepal would require heavier investments since you wouldn't have the basic requirements that you do find Italy.

Based on what you have **and** what you don't have you are able to make an initial selection.

Again I give you another example because I don't want you to think that I am suggesting you do not need to launch an investigation before your expansion. I don't want you to think I am advising you not to carry out market research. Not at all. Most

successful businessmen are successful because they carefully chose their markets, but they did not make a 100% correct choice and none of them were 100% globally aware. They made their initial selection based on their circumstances, strengths and weaknesses, and then made sure they chose the best possible option from this narrowed down selection.

OK, the example. Let's say I have friends in the real estate business and they tell me they have made an easy profit on a one-bedroom flat which they had converted into two studio flats. And I have always wanted to do the same. Now at any one time there is one flat sold in the UK with the highest relative profit margin. But I challenge any UK property expert to launch an investigation and locate this particular property for me.

Is it possible that the property expert is able to locate the most profitable property in the UK market? Well perhaps, but even then it doesn't mean that is the best investment option for me. Because even as the research is taking place time is passing. So maybe if I give this property expert six months he could find this property for me but within those six months I could have made three investments that together would have outperformed the initial property.

Therefore never forget that the most valuable asset of all and the most profitable investment you could ever make is **time management** and making sure your profit is considered in relation to how much time it needs.

In summary your challenge is not to find the perfect marketplace but to find a marketplace where you can grow your company's revenue and profit in the *quickest* possible time.

So having narrowed down the initial selection, how do you choose the best possible option from these choices?

How to choose the final candidates

While I have been trying to encourage you not to spend too much time in making your initial selection and not to linger too long over whether it should be this country rather than that one, and while I have been trying to help you not to be put off by the sheer size of the global market, I urge you to take the next step with great care and dedication.

Now that you have made your initial selection, your challenge is to make that perfect decision and find from these options the best possible market for you and your company. Here you will draw on past experience and make sure you carry out as much detailed market research as possible.

At this point you have to look at yourself as an independent researcher, someone who has been commissioned to carry out market research in a foreign country to extract the vital information needed for making a business decision.

This really helped me and I am sure it will help you too. With this type of attitude you can break this huge task down into smaller, bite-size projects and remove all fear from the equation. OK, you have been hired by a company to investigate a new or foreign market for them and you have been given a full run down on the business they are interested in and you have all the information that you need.

So where do you start? Well, it all comes down to one criterion and one alone.

Product popularity and market size

You need to find out whether the market you are interested in is a big enough market for you to be able to compete in it. There is

no point launching a successful business model where the market could reach its potential limit soon after your launch. Everything else is secondary and manageable, and you can draw from past experience and win customers just as long as there is a market for you to sell to.

The bigger the market the better for you, because entering a foreign market brings new and unexpected challenges, and let's face it, it will be much easier for the local service providers to compete with you in their own backyard. So you need a big market where your newly-won slice of the market goes unnoticed by the bigger players.

To obtain this kind of information you can use government statistics and similar sources but this is not enough. Here you will need to think outside the box. You need to utilise resources that can give you more than just numbers, ones that can give you a real feel for the business.

For example, ask your existing customer base in the UK if they have any family or friends with a similar business abroad. (We actually sent an SMS to all customers four weeks before our trip, asking them if they had anyone in Italy, the Netherlands or Belgium with similar businesses, and their introductions became the starting point of our research.)

All the above is what you would probably expect an entrepreneur to do in any case, but what you might have overlooked is how you can dig deeper. I need to use an example so I can further clarify this point. Let's say the business you are interested in is setting up a chain of Asian restaurants in Italy. (I have chosen this because it's a business I have no knowledge of and if the principle is going to work then I should be able to, in theory, get the result I would need.) I would start by visiting some of the local Asian restaurants in that country and look for something that they purchased for their restaurant which is unique to their business, for example, a certain piece of kitchen

equipment or even a certain kind of drink or food.

I would try to find out who their supplier is for that specific product and that would be my starting point. Of course no supplier will be a single source for these products but that is a good place to start. Let's remember that no one is obliged to give you any information just because you need the answers. You can ask but it does not mean you will get an answer, and also it does not mean you will get the right answer.

You will need to rely heavily on your communications skills.

As I said before these are the key skills for forming relationships between the supplier, the customer and your own team. Being an entrepreneur you will already have this particular skill which means you will eventually get the right answers to some of your questions.

If this supplier of ethnic restaurants equipment opens up and tells you how many Asian restaurants in Italy they supply then you have some idea of the market size. Forming a relationship with this supplier would be of great significance because they can tell you if their business is on the up (which means this is a growing market) or whether it has slowed down (which means it could be saturated).

As far as our business is concerned our targeted customers use a certain type of billing software to record their calls and visiting the leading provider of this software was our next point of call in our investigation. They weren't aware of our weaknesses and insecurities. To them we were a successful and powerful company from the UK which was about to launch in their country with offers of a potential partnership. To us they were the key to the market we so desperately wanted. They became our starting point, from where we began to fill in the rest of the gaps. You need

to form as many relationships as possible with parties who play an important part in this type of investigation.

Let's not forget the importance of customer feedback. You need to locate where your potential customer base might be and make sure you visit a few of them and ask them one key question;

“ If you could change something about your current supplier what would it be?”

This is a great question for getting the customer to open up.

Why did I think anyone would give me the time of day in answering my questions? Because I always offer a promise of unrivalled loyalty to those who are willing to help our company. If they see in me what I see in myself then they will know that if I managed to launch in their country with their help then I would offer them an alternative service at our low prices. These initial few customers, who are willing to give us insight into their market, will never regret their involvement. All I need is a foot in the door and a few initial customers who are willing to try our service. Winning one customer, and keeping them happy, means we can eventually win them all.

Some of the examples I have given were hypothetical and some specific to our business, but what I am trying to convey is that as you go through the above steps the once cloudy business plan begins to take on a solid framework and you will realise that the much needed knowledge is not a secret but a conclusion, one you will arrive at by examining the components.

The Mouse of Amsterdam

While we are busy doing our research, and launching the business, we are constantly on the move and have yet to face the reality of the task; we are in preparation mode if you like. But once all the dust has settled, and we are left alone with the voice of fear, we

will begin to doubt and question the outcome of our plan. All of a sudden we feel insecure and vulnerable as potential risks become more threatening. This is something I went through in the early days of my first trip to Amsterdam.

On the second week of my stay something happened that changed my outlook on this European venture and gave me much needed confidence during those lonely days.

I think it was a Monday. I just remember I had had a long and disappointing day. That night, at about 5am, while I was desperately trying to get to sleep, I heard a strange noise. At first I thought it was the flickering noise of the candles I had lit earlier. But the noise became more insistent and louder, so I got up and cautiously followed the noise to the kitchen and realised it was coming from my bread basket. I saw the basket moving and to tell you the truth I was a little scared and jumpy so I got hold of a wooden spoon and hit the basket. Suddenly a little black mouse stretched its neck out and for a few seconds we stared at each other before the mouse squeaked and jumped off the basket and vanished behind the microwave. The mouse had been trying to chew his way through the plastic bag that stood between him and my bread.

This was the first time I had come face to face with a mouse and the experience stayed with me all that day. A part of me was worried that he wasn't alone and that other mice would chew their way through my clothes and valuables, while the other part of me was wondering whether he and his family had gone hungry that night.

Either way, this was the experience which gave my confidence its much needed boost. It made me think about something which I have talked about before and reminded me of how right I have been in leaving my fears aside and keeping my faith.

I asked myself what would happen if I was to bring a mouse from the UK and let it loose here in Amsterdam. Would this mouse survive? How would it survive? What would it do in this strange and unfamiliar land?

The answer is 'it will do just fine'. Why? Because the mouse will follow his instincts and will use his unique mouse skills to find food and shelter. OK, I know that the mouse will probably not even know he is in a different country, because bricks and walls are the same everywhere, and so is leftover food, and my mouse will find his way to someone's basement just like he did back in the UK, but that does not change the fact that he does survive. It actually reconfirms the point I am trying to make.

An unfamiliar environment will quickly become a familiar environment if we follow our instincts which will guide us to what we need as well as to how we should get it.

After that experience I told myself

“ So here I am. Moved from the UK to the Netherlands. What is the difference between me and the local service provider who has been here all his/her life? It's easy – the answer is Knowledge.

I am the best in our industry back in the UK and now I am here trying to launch the same business for the same type of customer base. This is my unique selling point, knowing the essence of this business inside out.

So although I am now in a foreign land, all that has changed is the language, locations and certain laws. And all that I need to do is identify what I need to know, learn about it and launch the service; just as a mouse would settle down to getting on with living, when moved from one country to another.”

However, as I tried to encourage myself and give myself confidence, I realised that something quite significant had changed about me which had nothing to do with the project being launched in a new country.

What had changed was me and my expectations of this new project. The secret to our success back in the UK was that when we initially got involved in this project we had no idea what we needed to do. All we knew was that this was our way out of absolute failure. We charged in with 1000% commitment and embraced all its difficulties and a world of the unknown. We made it our business to get over every single hurdle and gain every bit of information we needed. We slowly expanded the workforce, during which time we made some mistakes but eventually found the golden team.

But when it came down to the European campaign for some reason I was expecting a perfect campaign and the thought of every little thing that we didn't know began to worry me.

The most important realisation for me was that I should not expect a perfect business plan. I should accept that there will be problems and that problems do not mean failure. Problems simply mean different challenges and what I needed to remind myself of was the fact that I am not here to launch a problem free business but to somehow use all my experience to create an additional revenue stream for my company.

So I reminded myself

“ “We will have to build this business up from scratch and enjoy the journey. The sooner I get to grips with this reality the better.” ”

This, my friends, is the key to entering new ventures.

PRINCIPLE #6

‘BUSINESS KUNG FU’ – NEVER GO TO WORK WITHOUT IT

One thing you always need to remember is that a business is like a living organism in as much as it needs a constant replacement of the energy which it burns in order to stay alive. It cannot stay still and somehow reserve its energy, it is in constant motion in order to maintain itself. A living organism cannot switch itself on and off, or be switched on and off, so that it can conserve its energy; every second that it is alive it utilises its energy to maintain itself, hence it is in constant need of replacing this energy. A business is exactly the same, with money being the energy that it uses. It has certain parts that eat into the money every second of every day, including bank holidays and New Year’s Day, such as, for example, the office rent, phone lines, and so on.

This ‘need’ for energy turns business into a daily battle, a battle against all the factors that threaten the survival of your company. The nature of a business challenge is such that it’s ever-changing and everyday. As market conditions change, we are faced with new and unexpected problems which threaten the continuity of our business and the energy source that is our income. Your business therefore needs constant care and you should never stop feeling

the urgency of this need. When you walk into your office and start a working day you need to remember you are in a constant fight. And just as you would do in a fight, you need to know how to avoid getting hit, how to block and how to defend yourself, how to be patient, and know when to attack.

In reality you are under constant attack and you will be facing one problem after another and your task is not to get knocked out, something which is bound to happen if you forget you are in a fight.

Business truly is a combat that takes places every second of every day, and the outcome of this combat is dependent on the level of your ‘business kung fu’.

I call it ‘business kung fu’ because it will require something over and above the things we have already spoken about. It’s not only about how you prepare for your challenges, it’s about trying to understand and affect the way your opponents prepare themselves too. It’s not only about your never giving up or treating every day as if it’s the first day of your business life, or knowing how to face the unknown. It’s also about working out the mental processes of your opponents and how you can throw them off course and affect their performance.

Most of what we do in business is with others; others we buy from and sell to, and others we compete with. Business ‘kung fu’ is **not** about what you can do best and focusing on your own performance but actually about taking into account the other person’s point of view so that you can affect their strategy.

And this brings us to a completely new type of challenge – psychological warfare and the art of understanding and identifying what others want and think about and what they strive to achieve. This is no longer about your making the possible effort; it’s about

affecting the other person's efforts and knowing how far they are willing to go.

Business 'kung fu' reminds us that if we are going to be successful we can't just focus on what we want but we need to also consider what our opponents want, plus we need to influence their long- and short-term strategies by having a negative impact on their performance. Let me explain.

The art of negotiation

During the process of learning we are introduced to a lot of new information, some of which will resonate with us and leave such an impression that it becomes an integral part of our lives. This has a lot to do with how well we have understood the new subject and how well we are able to identify it in the real world. It's like checking to see if your spaghetti is cooked or not; throw a few strands at the wall and see if any sticks. Well they will stick only if they are properly cooked.

What follows has stuck with me since the day I learned it and it has become part of my everyday business life and I am sure it will be the same for you.

There is a lot that can be said in relation to effective negotiation skills and one can easily dedicate a complete book to it. Tips such as:

- Never get emotionally involved.
- Never negotiate under pressure.
- Always clarify the legal and technical details.
- Don't look too keen.
- Even if you are, never admit to being the final decision maker.
- We have one mouth and two ears, so always listen more.

The list can keep on growing and each tip will have its sub-tips and so on. I do, however, think there is a more fundamental negotiations framework, to which such lists are complementary.

I came across this framework at a 'Negotiations Skills' workshop hosted by Henley Management College.

Let me begin by giving a simple example. You have decided to refurbish your apartment and the price range you have chosen for yourself is somewhere between £2,000 and £2,500, your minimum and maximum if you like. Let's say you end up paying £2,000. Would you now say you have come out of the deal as the winner? Or let's say you are the refurbishing contractor and had given yourself a range somewhere between £2,000 and £2,500 and you end up charging £2,500. Again would you say you had got the right deal?

It all depends. In order to answer the above we would first need to identify the three positions in any negotiation, and they are as follows:

- **Idealistic Position** = This is the position we would like to end up with at the end of the deal; the position we aim to achieve. When selling something we will aim to sell it at the highest possible price and we walk into a negotiation hoping to achieve this. In the above example, your ideal position, as the contractor, would be to do the refurbishment for £2,500, or when hiring someone to do the refurbishment for you your ideal would be to pay £2,000. The ideal is the position we would be most happy with.
- **Realistic Position** = As the name suggests this is a more realistic position, because although you wish to charge £2,500, you also know you will probably end up getting something near the £2,300 mark, a price based on the average going rate. Don't confuse this point with haggling; the realistic price is not the inevitable outcome of a negotiation, it's not the common 'not your price and not mine, so let's meet in the middle' situation; it is in fact a price that most people are willing to pay for a product. This is the price you prepare yourself to end up at.

- **Fallback position** = This is the point you are not willing to go beyond; this is your final position in a negotiation. We all have a fallback when walking into a negotiation. We all have a price we are not willing to buy above or sell below. In the above example you won't be willing to charge less than £2,000 or pay more than £2,500.

Before we continue it is absolutely vital that you understand one key principle: Do not set your idealistic position too high and too ideally, otherwise it will alienate the other party and will make them think you are not being fair or, worse, not really qualified. The gap between your ideal position and final fallback position cannot be too much otherwise the other party will think there is something wrong with the product and this is why you are willing to take such a massive drop in price.

Now, no matter how committed we are, how hard we work, how focused we are and how passionate we are about our business, we all walk into a negotiation with these three positions in mind. We will naturally have these positions in mind and cannot avoid them, because depending on what the negotiation is about, and who it's with, we won't always be able to get exactly what we want (our idealistic position), so we tend to leave room for manoeuvre and negotiation.

So, you have walked into a negotiation with your idealistic, realistic and fallback position and focus your efforts on achieving a deal somewhere along this range. Now let us go back to the initial refurbishment question: how can you tell if you have walked out of this negotiation as the winner?

This may surprise you but the way you must judge the success of a negotiation is not based on which of your positions you have managed to achieve. It is based on which of the other party's positions you have managed to achieve.

This is where the trick is. Every person also walks into the negotiation table with their own ideal, realistic and fallback

position and your task is to identify what each of these positions is. This is the art of negotiation.

If you want to refurbish your house for £2,000 and you actually end up refurbishing it for that price it still doesn't mean you came out of the deal as the winner. It all depends on how much the contractor was actually willing to accept, that is his/her fallback position. Maybe the contractor walked into the negotiation prepared to go as low as £1,800. The same applies the other way around. Maybe you were prepared to go higher than £2,500 and the contractor just focused on his own goal and didn't consider this possibility.

The art of negotiation is to try to identify the other person's positions. How can you achieve this without giving away too much?

You need to ignore your own positions and somehow try to figure out the positions of the person you are negotiating with, simply because theirs might be more in your favour than those you had planned initially. During this time the negotiation is actually taking place so you need to be careful not to give away too much because this will help the other person change his/her position too.

SO HOW DO WE START A NEGOTIATION?

Don't be the first person to mention a price

The single most important rule is not to be the first person to mention a price, because as soon as you do that you have given the other person an opportunity to position themselves against you.

If you are selling something always ask the buyer what budget they have in mind, and if you are the buyer always ask what sort of budget you should be considering. Always let the other person give you a price.

Either way at some stage you are going to have to mention what figure you have in mind. The ideal, realistic, and fallback are negotiating positions which I have learned; the following point is something I have added to the list myself as the fourth position in helping to start a negotiation.

- **Starting Position = The most important thing to remember is that your starting position is not your 'Ideal Position'.**

The mistake many make is to confuse their ideal position with their starting position. Any negotiation has to start from a certain price point but that point cannot be your ideal position, because you almost never end up getting your first offer accepted. We all like to feel we have been offered a good deal so we naturally don't like paying the initial asking price, and remember it pays to make people feel good about the deal they are going to make and it strengthens the relationship. So if you are hoping to achieve your 'ideal' then your first position cannot be that.

Therefore we need to introduce a fourth position to this equation, which we know we can never achieve under any circumstances. This is the **Starting Position**. Although this position will get refused flat out, it will give us an opportunity to analyse their strategy and identify their positions, as well as allowing us to remain within our own territory.

Never give anything away for free

The way to move from one position to the next is to create a bundled package which you are willing to unbundle in order to meet the customer's asking price. Using the example from before (where your ideal position is to charge £2,500 for a refurbishing contract), when giving a quote for this job you can include a few smaller additional jobs which would separately cost lets say £100

but you have added them onto your quote for an extra £200 in order to create a Starting Point of £2,700. Therefore in order to move the negotiation along you can first suggest reducing it to £2,600 (so you have offered them a discount) or you can suggest removing these jobs and doing the ones the client can afford. In worst case situations you can suggest doing it all for £2,500 and this would lose you an extra £100 on your ideal but still be far from your fallback.

By creating an initial bundled package you will learn a lot about the other person's position. For example their initial response could be for you to explain the additional jobs a little more in detail. This implies they have the budget but need to know if the job is worth the cost.

Using bundled packages and diversion tactics are common sales tools used by most companies.

One of the major mobile telephone stores in the UK actually introduced a similar marketing tool for selling their main product line. Their objective was to sell a certain handset model for, let's say, £200 and in order to achieve this goal they created three special offers of the month:

- 1) *a different handset with far less gadgets for £175 (only £25 less than the one they actually wanted to sell).*
- 2) *another handset with only a few more functions than the preferred one but at a much higher price of £300 (£100 above the preferred one). And finally*
- 3) *the one they actually aimed to sell at £200.*

When the customers entered the store and were presented with these three offers they naturally went for the third option as in comparison to the other two this one was better value for money.

I know this is a little different from what we were discussing above but nevertheless it illustrates how you can move the focus of a negotiation to your preferred position if you use comparisons between different offers.

What you have got to remember is that this is not a technique used to overcharge clients or underbuy. This is simply a means to ensure you come out of the deal with the best possible result, because as I said earlier, regardless of how fair and reasonable it might be nobody likes to pay the initial asking price, and in a negotiation someone usually ends up getting a better deal and your task is to ensure that someone is you.

The other reason could simply be that you are new to the business and are not sure what the best price is for the service which you are trying to buy or sell. Of course you have done your research but it does take months if not years of being in the business before you can identify the best possible price point. The starting position therefore could prove very useful in the early stages of setting up your business.

So next time you are talking to a supplier or a customer you need to remember that what they are willing to settle on might be more in your favour than what you had initially hoped for, and the purpose of your negotiation is to clarify this fact.

Use 'psychological warfare' to crush your competitor's confidence

When you are involved in a business you can be sure that your competitors are planning their next attack and that at least one new competitor is rising from scratch. The story of a business is the story of how you fight your battles so you can avoid the war.

You need to take all competition seriously and give them the benefit of the doubt, assuming that they too have the tenacity you had when you first launched your business. I remember what we went through when we first launched ours and had to win

customers from other players. The most significant factor for us was when we won our first customer and managed to keep him for a week. What that showed us was that the market leader or leaders had a weakness, an Achilles' heel. The market leader of our time seemed invincible, as they were many times bigger than us and had resources we could not even dream of, but they made one mistake – they ignored small business losses and if they lost one small customer it really didn't matter to them.

What they ignored gave us all that we needed – a little confidence.

The same is true of your competitors; they are energetic and determined to take your business away from you, and all they need too is a little confidence. Therefore your task is be to deprive them of this.

How to crush your competitor's confidence

So let us remember, our competitors are desperate and need to win customers to survive and, more importantly, they need to believe in what they are doing. Therefore our job is to make sure they conclude, very early on, that this is a much more difficult task than they had initially thought. We are here to make our competitors re-think their business strategy before they implement it and become committed.

The only way we can achieve this is by not ignoring the loss of even the smallest of customers, by launching counterattacks straightaway, and thus avoiding a full-blown war later on.

Of course a worthy adversary will not pull back at the first defeat and will persevere much longer than you would wish, but

nonetheless, your job is to demonstrate your defensive nature and willingness to fight, which will dent a hole in their much needed confidence and make them re-think their strategy, eventually creating panic and total disarray.

We know what goes on in the minds of our competitors, because we have been there before them.

Let us remember. You have managed to take an idea, with the help of next to no initial capital, and turn it into a market leading business. This means that you have endured at least a few years of sacrifice with as little financial reward as imaginable. This sacrifice alone means not a lot of other individuals or companies are willing to go through the same pain.

Generally speaking, people adopt a short-term plan for reaching their financial goals and not everyone has the foresight that you have had for all these years.

So when dealing with the competition it's key to make them see what type of sacrifices they will have to make if they are to take you head on. Our task is to convince them that they too will have to endure the same pain.

You want their 'on the road' sales people to lose all hope and motivation, to go and sit in a pub somewhere, at the end of a long, miserable day, and just stare at the passing crowd and feel isolated from the rest of the world, because they haven't been able to make the smallest difference, and reflect on how insignificant their efforts have been that day.

You want them to think their challenge is no longer about winning customers, which is hard enough anyway, but actually keeping them. A new variable has all of a sudden been thrown into the mix, a hurdle, which due to your 'immediate response' approach, is proving nearly impossible to overcome. You want

them to think of this disastrous day as a template for all their days to come.

Even if you don’t manage to win back the lost customer, by launching immediate counterattacks you have given the impression of a company which is not going to allow competitors to take its customers easily. This will translate, in the mind of your competitors, into a long term war with the possibility of no financial rewards for the foreseeable future.

Mission accomplished.

You can be sure when they first sat down and put together their business plan their key reason for thinking it would work would have been their belief in your lack of interest in smaller customers as well as your inability to win them back if they were to take them away from you. They would have thought this because this is what you thought when you first launched your business. However by launching immediate and small counterattacks you will start to change their belief system.

Launching smaller counterattacks early on, rather than engaging in a full blown war later on, is the best course of action.

This is true not only when we consider the competition’s point of view, as we have done above, but even when we consider our own situation.

Don’t forget, the bigger the business becomes and the longer you have remained as a market leader the more tired your team will be and the more they will lack the enthusiasm they had when you first launched the business. It’s like the human body, the longer we live the weaker our body becomes and we have to do everything in our power to even avoid catching the common cold.

Therefore in the later stages of life it's more important to prevent any illness, because if we do become weak our chances of recovery will be lower compared to when we were young.

So it's better to take precautions now than to have to deal with a deadly illness later, when we will certainly not have the energy to fight it off. And that is the story of the rise and fall of many empires.

Therefore it is best to address a threat as soon as you become aware of its existence, rather than to have to launch a full-blooded attack when the threat has become a significant one.

Think about it: if a competitor is starting to take a few of your customers and you don't see yourself able to win them back now, what will it be like when you have lost a considerable chunk of your customers? It will be many times more difficult than having to win them back earlier on, because later you would again need to go through what you did when you first launched the business.

But you may think it's a question of allocating resources and that it is more efficient to dedicate your team's efforts to other more pressing matters rather than having them win back an insignificant customer. If so then let me assure you, when that time comes and you suddenly feel the collective loss of a number of such small insignificant customers, you will have no choice but to quickly change strategy to win back this source of income, and that will cause disarray as well as create a costly shift of focus. Therefore whichever way you look at it, short-term or long-term, it's better to allocate a small portion of your time to winning back small lost customers as soon as you lose them.

OK, we have now decided we must launch immediate and small counterattacks in order to make our competitors doubt their business plan. But how do we do that?

It is easy to say but how can we really put fear in the heart of our competitor, who has invested in this project and has allocated resources focused on taking our revenue?

This really depends on your line of business and I cannot give specific example as they will vary from one case to another, but what I would say is that at the end of the day competition is either about price or quality and one of the greatest lessons I have learned is never compete on price because customers won on price are lost on price.

Customers won on price are lost on price

If you are faced with a competitor who is trying to undercut your prices you must consider the following.

If they are positioning themselves at much lower prices than you then you must decide whether your pricing structure is incorrect and whether you are being too greedy. This is usually not the case, because when you start a business from just an idea and go through years of tough competition, you would naturally position your prices in a way that would win you customers and at the same time make a profit to self fund the project. In situations such as this pricing is usually guided by an invisible force created by the mutual need of similar companies competing in the same marketplace.

Therefore if you are faced with a company that is undercutting you by a considerable margin it might mean that they have a lower cost base than you, which means you must revisit your suppliers, make sure you are buying at the lowest possible price and maintain the quality that made you popular. Of course in most cases you will find that the only way your competitors are undercutting you is by either just breaking even or making a loss, which is justifiable to them as an investment for entering the market.

You cannot and should not match the new pricing structure, because there might be a new competitor born every day who is willing to make a loss, but you on the other hand will still need to

cover your costs and make a profit. So how do you compete with them?

You may not be able to win back every single customer lost to the cheaper supplier, but one thing is for sure, the new supplier will not be able to maintain selling below, or at cost, for too long. What justifies their initial loss is the belief that one day soon (maybe after a year) they would have expanded their customer base to a point where they can utilise their established customer-supplier relationship to slowly increase their prices. A proven strategy used by many companies.

Therefore the more faith they have in this long-term business plan the more persistent they will be in implementing it. Your task is to create doubt in their minds with regards to this plan. Your task is to show them you are not going to ignore the smallest of setbacks, however insignificant they may be in the grand scheme of things.

You must revisit the smallest lost customer, because the smallest customer to you is 'one step closer to the plan' for your competitor. Instead of lowering your prices, which will change the long-term expectations of your customers, you must revisit them with new services and developments and perhaps a few temporary special offers as a 'thank you' for their loyalty.

Focus on offering better customer service and a superior quality.

Instead of keeping your focus on your competitor's lower prices you need to redirect the focus of your customers on how your efforts will be targeted at offering them the best possible package at all times. Use your relationship with the clients to remind them of how much their loyalty means to you.

This will make your competitors rethink their fundamental belief, their certainty of being able to easily win a few of your

customers without your putting up a real fight. Now they will wonder if this initial position is worth the risk.

Be assured that the main topic of their next team meeting will be your persistent and dedicated approach. Do not allow them to celebrate the smallest victory. Make them think first of your reactions when they think of taking one of your customers. Let them see how tired-proof you are and let them visualise, for the first time, how hard they will really have to work for this business which may not even turn out in their favour because of your persistence. Take away the confidence and passion which is the foundation of their plan.

It's all about the balance between investment and the potential return. Your task is to make their lives hell and convince them that their initial 'under cost selling price' will never amount to anything because you have a good chance of wining back your customers. Then they will come to think that they might as well increase their prices, changing their strategy, which will lead to yours fighting them on more equal ground.

The uncomfortable evolution of man

Being successful in business isn't just about knowing your numbers and learning a few techniques, it's also about having the ability to manage your own expectations as well as knowing how to deal with the mental stress.

It all depends on how we view our challenges and the harsh conditions in which we work (competitive markets, global financial crises, and so on).

Although being in a constant fight is painful and tiresome it is at the same time a unique opportunity for us to reach our potential, because it is during our struggle for survival that we end up utilising, and developing, our hidden talents. We need to embrace our challenges and regard them as unique opportunities

for us to reach our potential, and to do that we need to change the way we look at our problems and view them in a different light. This is what I aim to show with this section of the book.

Some of mankind's greatest achievements have been the result of our constant battle for survival and our never-ending pursuit of a better quality of life.

The history of 'glassmaking' and its development is an interesting one to examine, simply because of the key role glass has played in the invention of the telescope and other major optical apparatus. Although China was considered to be one of the most advanced civilisations in different fields such as engineering, it had very little to do with developments in the glassmaking field. It seems 'need' had a lot to do with this, in that China simply didn't need to focus on glassmaking, because neither their homes nor their drinking habits required that focus. The Chinese used sophisticated porcelain (also known as china) for making their containers and tea drinking cups (and other hot beverages) which perfectly suited their needs. It's not that the Chinese didn't have the know-how. In fact they knew how to manufacture glass, but they didn't focus on it anywhere near as much as the Europeans did, simply because they didn't need to. China comfortably manufactured porcelain and exported it to the rest of the world for centuries. In Europe however wine and beer were the preferred beverages and making drinking glasses became important. So the Europeans focused more time and resources to its development, which, as a mature technology, became the basis for developing eyeglasses, lenses, telescopes and so on, all major breakthroughs in our history – with 'need' sitting in their centre.

We should never feel too comfortable in business because that will affect our momentum and it will stop our growth. We

need to welcome challenges and view them as a blessing in disguise. Harsh conditions will force us to constantly look for a better solution and it is during this persistent struggle that we discover hidden talents and previously ignored resources, something that will give us an edge over our competitors; a new ammunition that was created out of pure necessity and desperation, just as it was for the Europeans at a time when China was a world superpower.

This is a fact that goes beyond business and we can see its impact on other aspects of life on our planet.

When the land creatures began to take to the sky and for the very first time used their new wing feature, the rest of the animal kingdom no doubt watched in envy, ready to recognise these birds as the superior species, the marvels of creation. The story of evolution should have come to its end as these flying creatures were equipped with a tool that could help them travel between continents in relatively short periods of time, escaping environmental conditions, food shortages and above all the threats of the land roaming beasts of their time. The sky had its own share of challenges but overall the emergence of wings and flying gave the birds an advantage over the rest.

It was the birds that won the first ever evolutionary prize by doing what all other animals wished they could do. It seemed that the birds were marked as the front runners of this evolutionary journey, as the masters of our planet.

Few other jumps in the history of evolution were as impressive as the jump between land creatures and the birds. They were truly equipped with the ultimate weapon to remain as the master race. They defied the laws of nature, the gravity that has imprisoned us all.

And yet, the ultimate evolutionary prize was won by the least suspecting contestant with the least impressive tools.

How did the odds change against the birds and in favour of our ancestors?

What happened to the birds was a comfortable evolution. An evolutionary step triggered through the struggles of the underdog, but designed to offer a comfortable solution and result. 'When the going gets tough the tough fly away' kind of thing. The birds did not have to stay and face the troubles at home.

But for those that had no other choice, evolution took an uncomfortable turn. 'Uncomfortable evolution', because the tool that had evolved for our ancestors was a tool that could be used while facing a problem. And facing the problem was all they could really do.

Our ancestors could neither run very fast nor fly, so they had to face immediate natural disasters, and when confronted by predators we lacked any real fighting power to win in a one-to-one combat. All the signs of a failure in the making. We too were destined to become extinct.

The tool that our ancestors evolved gave them the ability to constantly devise temporary solutions for the problems which they always had to live with. You see, they couldn't escape their problems or run away from them – they had to face them.

They simply had to face them and find a solution for them, no matter how short term.

The birds on the other hand found a much more long-term and reliable solution and, in comparison to early man, they seemed to face a lower chance of extinction. This is one key to the story of evolution.

Evolution offered the birds a solution to avoid problems and altogether a more comfortable way of living, but the key to

progress in evolution is the struggle itself, without which it would come to a halt.

Of course the birds faced their share of problems and dangers, but not enough to have to dig as deep as we had to do once upon a time. For us, the struggle for survival was an everyday, if not an every hour, challenge.

It seems being small and weak is the main reason why we are here today; living with constant challenges which we could never permanently resolve, living with inescapable limitations, which posed a real and immediate danger to our existence. All of which became the engine that drove the evolution of our problem solving ability.

It would be a mistake to think of Man's journey as one triggered by chance, as though we were the lucky ones born with this problem-solving brain. Both we and the birds share a common ancestor and while the tree of life was branching out towards the sun, one particular branch happened to find a more permanent source of light. Not the sun itself, but enough to live happily ever after. We on the other hand had to compete for the faintest of rays.

You see, the birds didn't depend, as much as we did, on their problem-solving ability, so even if they were born with a brain that had the potential to grow into one like ours, they would never have felt the need to use it.

The urgency for utilising all that you have at your disposal is the key for developing your hidden business talents.

Two people will go to the same training course but only one will end up mastering the newly learned sales technique because he/she has a target that needs to be met.

We truly learn the art of bargain hunting when we are under immense financial stress and need to make ends meet.

We create extremely tight and very controlled credit terms for our customers when we are facing major cash flow issues (just look at the current global financial crisis which arose out of the banks' careless lending habits compared to their recent, tighter conditions and you will see what I mean).

We must welcome all challenges and unfortunate outcomes, because it is by dealing with them that we will truly reach our highest potential.

I often travel to Tehran for business, as I offer consultancy to a couple of sales and marketing companies there, and what I experienced one evening is so related to what we have already discussed that I couldn't resist sharing it with you to finish off the chapter.

When a taxi in Iran spots a waiting passenger they tend to slow down and drive past them with their windows wound down, and the passengers will shout out their destination at which point the taxi driver will decide either to stop and accept the fare or to look for another passenger. It all depends on traffic and where the driver needs to go next and so on.

On one occasion, sometime between 9 or 10 at night, after finishing my work for the day, I walked down to the main square looking for a taxi. One slowed down near me and I shouted out my destination. He stopped and I got in. As soon as I got in I realised that the driver, who was a man in his 60s, had impaired hearing and was mute, and as a result he had not been able to understand the destination I wanted to go to. So he handed me a note pad and I wrote down where I was going. We then agreed the fare and started to drive.

What stunned me the most was how this man was able to do what he does with such disability? The taxi business in Iran is cut-throat and it's all about choosing the right passenger and the right destination and negotiating the best

possible rate with them. None of which was easy for this man to achieve.

I was amazed at his focus and tenacity so when we reached our destination I offered to buy him a cup of tea and asked how he dealt with his problems. What he managed to explain to me was the following:

He couldn't do what other drivers did, which was to pick the right passengers as they shouted out their destinations. Therefore he had to stop for every passenger, which is difficult enough in the middle of moving traffic, and then somehow understand where they wanted to go, accept the destination once he knew it, and finally negotiate the fare: the same lengthy routine for every single passenger.

Because of the time he loses in stopping for each passenger, and the fact that he can't refuse them after they have got in, he has had to accept every destination at every hour of the day. In order to overcome this problem he has made it his business to learn every shortcut and alleyway in Tehran enabling him to take passengers to wherever they want to go, rather than specialising on one part of this huge city which is what other drivers do. And as far as traffic goes he also has to identify the quietest routes during peak times. As a result of this he has been able to get his passengers to their final destination faster than most drivers.

"This way I can do more trips than other drivers and also earn more tips. In general I have happier customers," he explained.

After we had finished our tea I wished him good luck and I went home.

The story of this taxi driver left a huge impression on me and made me think of our current topic; how we are able to utilise our challenges and struggles to our advantage, and how our struggle for survival can drive us to create an edge over our competitors.

You must wake up tomorrow with a different outlook on your everyday struggles and problems. Our potentials are hidden within us and the only catalyst that can trigger them is our struggle for survival. It's during such intense conditions that unknowingly we begin to explore and exercise our hidden abilities.

It's during our fight for survival that this potential comes out of hibernation and changes from dormant to active. All it needs is the right condition for it to come to life.

So instead of looking at my struggles as 'just a phase that will pass', I now welcome them more than ever. Throw at me all you have got! I know that somewhere amongst my suffering you are giving me the chance to get one step closer to my purpose.

I don't wish for my problems to come to an end as I now accept them as the main ingredient for making me who I am.

So change the way you think of your problems and remember this point; it is only through our challenges that we will reach our potential.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

PRINCIPLE #7

USE YOUR CRISES AS A CHANCE TO DEMONSTRATE YOUR EFFICIENCY

We all begin our business journeys with the aim of offering the perfect level of service as well as the best possible package to our targeted customers. When we imagine what our business will offer we think of offering exactly what it was designed to do, we look at what someone else is doing and hope to do it either as well as or better than them.

What we soon realise, however, is that delivering the perfect product depends on having perfect conditions. Everything else will need to work like clockwork for our product to meet its maximum potential. However, as I mentioned before, 'perfect conditions are not a must but an added bonus' and we were introduced to a more realistic version of our business plan and the difference between what we actually end up offering to our clients rather than what we planned to offer.

This is where we become formally acquainted with our business's service/quality issues, issues that could determine the longevity of our business plan, issues that could have a long-term impact on our reputation.

Yes, service issues are inevitable and this is why we have to prepare ourselves for the time when our company will face them.

You may find you will start going through periods of awful service issues very early on in your business, and this is because you have had to start the company from scratch and most likely with very little capital. For those of you who have gone through the same journey you will know that having little capital means you cannot be choosy about your suppliers who play a key role in any business. The quality of what you sell depends on the quality of what you buy, and although you may have had great ambitions for the business, and advertised yourselves to be a professional service provider, you can't actually work with your preferred suppliers which in turn can have a domino effect on your business. After all, a worthwhile supplier means better service for your end users.

This in fact is a Catch-22 situation, because as a start-up business what we need most is a superior level of service compared to our competitors so we can win their customers and grow, but to get that superior level of service we have to be big enough to attract the right suppliers which we can't do because of our small size. Since we cannot approach the suppliers we have in mind we are forced to start with suppliers lower down the food chain.

You must start your business journey with your eyes wide open, knowing that one of your biggest challenges, while you build up the business, is going to be the level of your service.

The good news, however, is that you can use your service issues to actually win your customers' loyalty, because, as we will shortly see, crisis gives us a chance to demonstrate our efficiency and it is this demonstration that will set us apart from our competitors, just as a gardener will be remembered for how he saved the flowers through the winter.

The trick is to shift the focus from your issues and onto how you deal with them.

The success of a business is dependent on the loyalty it can generate from its customers. If you can somehow emotionally bond with your customers and build a relationship with them, the chances are they will remain with you and you will benefit from their continuing custom.

The well-known saying 'people buy from people' is the key point here.

Generally in life people do not automatically pause to consider the intense and passionate labour going on behind the scenes of a perfectly working system. This is because all we see is that perfectly working system and not the people who make it happen.

On the other hand when something goes wrong we get the chance to come out from behind closed doors and illustrate how efficiently and passionately we treat our business and how the satisfaction of our customers is all that we strive to achieve.

A crisis gives us a chance to demonstrate our efficiency.

Basically, when we face service issues we get the chance to show off a different side of us, which otherwise we could not have revealed. There is nothing more impressive than showing your customers that your company is made up of passionate and dedicated individuals. Suddenly these individuals have come on stage to resolve all the issues and do everything necessary to restore the service their customer needs, and make sure that customer has forgiven them. This is when your company begins to be seen as 'people' and this is when 'people will buy from people'.

When facing service issues be ‘efficient’ but be ‘proud’

It’s all about the attitude with which you face your customers when you are experiencing service issues. Most companies hide away from their customers in such situations because they feel embarrassed and somewhat ashamed about having problems and quality issues in the first place.

Well, first things first. There is no need to feel embarrassed. When facing major service/quality issues you need to remember you are not the only service provider with such issues. Problems and service interruptions are common and unavoidable; so there is no need for embarrassment. Where you can and must be different, however, is in how you deal with these issues.

To understand the point I am making you must realise that we live in a world where we are constantly let down by people, where time and time again, as end users or as a business, we experience service issues and interruptions from our service providers. So we are used to experiencing these issues and accept them as the way of the world; not everything works like clockwork and both man and machine will fail to perform once in a while.

So when your business is experiencing service issues you can be sure you are not the only business in your field with these types of issue. Problems are common, from late buses to power failures, and ‘no network coverage’ and so on and so forth.

Where you can be unique and stand out is how you deal with these issues. In most cases companies fail to acknowledge or even take responsibility for their issues. When they are trying to sell something to us we can always find someone on the other end of the phone, but when trying to report a fault or get a responsive and accountable answer for a major problem, we are either put on hold or we have to press key after key listening to a never-ending automated menu, at the end of which we may not even get a clear answer.

Thanks to the other service providers' poor customer service we are presented with an opportunity to show we have a more efficient side. This is where we get the chance to face our frustrated customers with pride, pride in our willingness to do whatever it takes to resolve the issue, pride in our reactions to issues.

What customers hate more than anything is poor customer service, and I think this is because we all allow room for mistakes and we can all understand that somewhere down the service chain there might be issues affecting the quality of the service. What customers won't forgive you for, however, is not providing them with an efficient means of raising their concerns.

We humans are emotional beings and we need to remember this always. Our customers are emotional too and although our poor level of service will make them angry and frustrated, our 'most efficient' customer service approach, on the other hand, will win their hearts and minds.

Customers might hate their service provider but they could love their Account Manager – don't forget 'people buy from people'.

The other key point to remember is that humans are creatures of habit generally and we don't often change one service provider for another unless we are faced with an offer too good to refuse or unless we are repeatedly let down by a service provider who seems not to care. We usually choose a service provider and stick with them as this helps us keep in with our routine and avoid what we hate the most – 'change'.

Therefore, when your customers experience your service issues, they won't really know for sure if another service provider has less or more of such issues. To them these service issues could happen regardless of which company they have chosen to use. If you offer them an extremely efficient customer service your

customers will stay, believing that although you have these issues you are nonetheless doing everything possible to resolve them. And more often than not this is enough to keep them and buy you the needed time to look for a more long-term solution.

So what about when competing with other service providers who never have these types of issues? Can we still create customer loyalty when we know we have far more issues than our direct competition?

I think the question should really be ‘is there a company out there whose service is perfect and without issues?’ As far as our customers are concerned I think it’s safe to say most of them are not business experts and certainly not industry experts so although they can complain when unhappy with your service, they can’t see the real cause of the issue and won’t actually know for sure whether other service providers have these issues or not. And as far as you are concerned, although you are the industry expert I think again it’s safe to say you don’t use your competitor’s products enough times and in enough conditions to know whether they have these issues or not. At the end of day, and as mentioned before, regardless of the nature of their business, all service providers will have their own share of issues and you can therefore assure your customers that these types of issues are common in your line of business (your competitors go through the same thing) but you intend to resolve them as soon as possible.

Therefore if you are having service issues or are offering poor quality service you need to remind your customers, and your own team, that you are not the only service provider with this problem. You can, however, separate yourself from your competitors by offering your unhappy customers an efficient customer service and an open door for their complaints; this, my fellow entrepreneurs, is not something all service providers can often be bothered to do.

Let’s face it, generally people don’t own up to their mistakes. When they do something wrong they prefer to hide behind

closed doors until the storm has passed. It takes courage to face disappointed, angry, and frustrated customers, and when you do face them and show your ownership of the problem and accountability for what has gone wrong, the customers see something unique in you – something that impresses them because they know this characteristic is not common.

This is where you can be proud and separate yourself from the rest by acknowledging your issues and doing everything in your power, as quickly as possible, to resolve them. And this is the attitude with which you must face your customers even during your company's worst service disaster. This is why you must be proud rather than embarrassed.

The key is to create loyalty with customers and always think about winning. In this case you should not be thinking about what you are losing because of service issues but what you may be able to win even in these grim circumstances.

I am sure you have set up your business believing that you will offer the best level of service to your customers; otherwise you wouldn't have embarked upon this journey. And of course it's better not to have issues and to be able to maintain the initially intended perfect image but, as explained earlier, when you do create a business from scratch issues will be inevitable. So in the meanwhile you must do all you can to maintain the loyalty of each and every one of your customers so even if you do lose some of them to a competitor it would only be on a temporary basis. You know what they feel for you and that they are so happy with your customer service and passion for the business so that they will come back to you as soon as you are again able to offer them the right level of service.

In life we might not always have the chance to be the best but we most certainly always get the chance to be better, the chance to be better than someone else and keep closing the gap between ourselves and the best.

It's not about having issues, it's about your reaction to your issues. Customers can forgive you for offering poor service but they will never forgive you if you don't show them that you care.

I too am a customer on a daily basis and as a consumer what I hate most is not being able to voice my complaints to my suppliers. We all hate the big corporates for not being there when we need them but we see them everywhere when they are trying to sell us something.

Remember what you hate the most about other service providers and make sure your customers don't feel the same way about you.

In summary: if you are experiencing service/quality issues you need to be efficient and proud at the same time. Proud because although you are not the only service provider with such issues you do react with greater efficiency and acknowledge your mistakes and take responsibility for them, as well as being prepared to do everything in your power to resolve them; something other service providers might not be willing to do.

You can do this by shifting the focus from your issues and onto your problem-solving procedures.

Shift the focus from what you don't have to what you have

In business I have always believed it's not 'what you don't have' that matters the most, but it's 'what you have' that ultimately makes the difference. It's all about utilising what you have and developing existing features into better and more improved versions, so as to compensate for what you don't have.

I have used evolutionary examples in other chapters of the book because I am a great believer in evolutionary forces, but through the course of my business life I have witnessed how

certain companies have managed to survive business storms and as a result how these companies have evolved into becoming unique at what they do. Some companies just roll over and die but those who allow their survival instincts to kick in soon find themselves developing defensive mechanisms without which they would surely have ceased to exist long ago.

Your passion for the business, and your undivided attention to what you now call your baby, means you are not going to roll over and die, and this means you will start to evolve.

Suddenly instead of being referred to as the company which is having a few service issues you will be remembered as the company with the best customer service, and this is how you can turn the tide in your favour.

The trick is to shift your focus from what you don't have and bring all that you do have to the forefront of your mind.

The service issues are out of your hands and there is little you can do about them so you accept them to be a given (of course you will try to spend as much time as possible with the supplier, aiming to improve the service, but as explained before you will have to accept a certain amount of issues when starting from scratch). What is in your hands, however, and where you are in total control, is in the quality of your customer service and how you plan to deal with disappointed customers.

The key at this point is to offer the best customer service and account management possible and make a name for yourself by offering the most efficient and customer-focused service centre. You will soon realise that actually having these issues offers you a great opportunity to come face to face with customers and show them just how dedicated and passionate you are about your company and how you, who represent the company, can be known as individuals who take responsibility for their failures and at the same time have what it takes to stick with this business and deliver the best overall package to the customer.

Suddenly those ‘nightmare-like service issues’ will become an opportunity for you to market something unique about your company.

Therefore, now that you have accepted service issues as part and parcel of creating a business from scratch, you are going to need to develop new features to maintain the loyalty of disappointed customers.

Below is a list of the things which you can do in order to achieve this goal. Each step can be achieved in different ways and there is no single way for any of them either, so you must choose and design features that best suit your company.

At the end of the day all that I am suggesting is that you keep in mind the tick list below so that at any one time you can confidently point to a set of features in your company that do in fact address these points.

- 1. Leave an open door for your customers to raise their complaints:** Your customers should be able to report faults and raise their concerns as easily as they can purchase something from you. Your fault reporting channels need to be as accessible to your customer as your sales channels are. Now that the UK market is becoming more and more competitive it seems companies are suddenly beginning to focus on offering a better customer service. I guess these days they feel they have to, otherwise they might lose their customer base to a more caring supplier, but sometimes such changes are made far too late as new and more responsible competitors win the loyalty of their customers. Your response time to complaints must match your response time to sales enquiries; this is how you will set yourself apart from the rest.
- 2. Allow your customers to tell you how you can improve certain aspects of your business:** It’s not always about issues and interruptions, it’s also about improving existing parts

of the business, and to do that there is no better way than asking your customers what they think of your service. Not only does this enable you to portray yourself as a company that cares about its customers but you also get a chance to get that little bit closer to becoming the best in your field. 'Customer surveys' are the best tool for this exercise. However you must remember your customers don't have to give you their feedback so you need to make the process quick and easy. Use online surveys which are simple to fill in and environmentally friendly at the same time, while allowing you to collate your results in a more efficient manner. Where possible offer your customers a small incentive for taking the time out to let you know what they think.

- 3. Always be the first to spot your own service issues:** You need to be a consumer of your own product and somehow you have to make it your challenge to experience exactly what your customer experiences when dealing with your company; everything from calling your office to using an actual product. If customers come to you with a fault that you are not aware of, it means you are not in touch with your own business, which raises a further question: how can you be expected to offer a value for money package if you don't even know what issues you have? Therefore you need to use your own service or have allocated customers who are willing to keep you constantly informed in return for getting a special discount from you (customers who are willing to contact you as soon as your service suffers an interruption).
- 4. Be the first to inform your customers of your service issues:** Your customers depend on your service either for their personal or for their business affairs, and they plan their schedules around your service, whatever your service may be. Therefore you need to create a system through which you can inform your customers of your issues as soon as you have

spotted them. With today's communication technologies this can be achieved quickly and cheaply. Use SMS messages for example – this is what we do in our business. As soon as we spot an issue we send an SMS message to all our clients informing them of the problem. This way they can plan their day around your issues and won't feel let down.

There is another reason why you should be the first to inform your customers and that reason is 'honesty'. Most companies avoid informing their clients of their issues, hoping not all will notice or that not all will really care. But is this the best approach? Here is an example which you can apply to any business model. Imagine you are running a fast food outlet, a takeaway, with the dream of opening a chain. Which is better? I come to your outlet and purchase my usual kebab only to go home and find out it is a little on the burnt side. Or you say to me "Tonight your favourite kebab might be a little burnt?" The fact of the matter is that nine out of ten people would prefer the latter. This is the key, because by being honest with the customer you will bond with him/her and the customer will feel they can trust you, and this trust plays a very important part in business life.

By definition an issue is something that was not planned and an incident which will pass once normal service is restored. By informing your customers of your issues you will assure them that this lower level of service is in fact an unfortunate incident which you are aware of and are doing everything in your power to resolve, as opposed to the customer's thinking you have permanently opted for a lower quality service in order to cut costs, etc.

- 5. Explain to them what steps were taken to resolve these issues:** Always communicate with your customers the extent of your efforts for resolving your issues, rather than letting

them know the matter was simply resolved. This goes back to the point we discussed in Principle 3 about the power of propaganda. As we have said when facing service issues we get a chance to illustrate a more efficient side and here is our chance to communicate that efficiency and dedication to our customers. Tell them, for example, how you have changed your meat supplier, or how you have allocated X number of engineers to work round the clock until the matter is resolved, or how much extra you have invested in the business to avoid further issues like this, and so on. As mentioned before how you deal with your issues is more important than the issues themselves. Issues will happen and that is understandable, how you deal with them is what you will be judged on, and the secret is sharing the details of your efforts rather than giving an overall result.

Even in a historical context it is always the details of heroic acts that make them heroic, the details that illustrate the sacrifice and dedication of the individuals involved. Of course not all details can be shared as some information is sensitive, but you can still highlight the steps you have taken to overcome a particular challenge.

- 6. Always create and maintain a readily-available link between your customers and your company's 'high-level management':** One common issue is not being able to raise a fault with someone high up in a company. This is about customers being able to report a fault about how someone in your company handled their initial complaint. Some times, at best, all we get is a first line support who might be having a bad day or someone who doesn't really care about their routine job. It could also be that there simply is a gap in your customer service procedure and a few customers have fallen through that gap. I am sure this has happened to you when you were angry and frustrated and just wanted

someone to take your call seriously but all you got was a general customer support member who might have cut you off or was perhaps unable to resolve your issues. You end up calling them again and again, hoping you will be able to speak to someone higher up. As the company grows, and its initial creators become busy with expansion projects and so on, customers might feel neglected and let down by the new team members. Therefore it is absolutely essential that you leave your customers with a way for them to be able to come directly to you or someone in your organisation that you trust.

The trick is to keep on growing but still maintain the caring attitude that comes with a small company mentality, and you can achieve this by offering your customers an option so they can always get hold of a senior team member.

To overcome this issue in our company, specially from the time I started spending most of my time expanding into Europe, we created a 'Tell Me' button on our website that allows customers to send me, and our MD, an urgent e-mail when they are either having an issue which no one in my company seems to be able to resolve, or when they feel mistreated or neglected in some way. This has been one of our best features as it has kept me in touch with our business's day-to-day matters as well as making our customers feel they are still as important to us as on the day we first signed them up. This has also allowed me to have an ongoing understanding of how our customers perceive our service.

This list is something we developed out of a sheer struggle for survival and was used as a defence mechanism to overcome our ongoing service issues. By offering the most efficient customer service in your line of business you will certainly raise

the standard and your customer's expectations above your competitors, and this is how you can use your service issues to work in your favour.

So the purpose of the above tick-list? To shift the customer's focus away from your service issues and on to your dedication and efficiency in resolving them.

We get the chance to show our efficiency only in times of trouble

When everything is going well you don't get to show how much you care and you don't get to show off your ability to react fast in resolving an issue.

When something goes wrong we get the chance to impress people with how efficient we can be in dealing with such issues and how fast we react in times of trouble. When your company is having major service or quality issues, it is your chance to win the minds and hearts of your customers rather than lose them to a competitor.

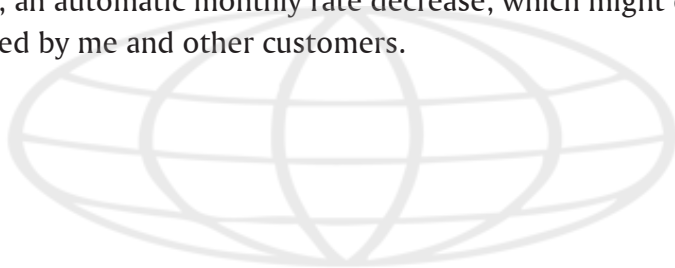
I mean would I give the time of day to my personal mobile network operator if they had someone calling me up to tell me how hard they have worked to ensure I have experienced as few service issues as possible? I think not.

However, I would be more patient and impressed if this particular mobile company was to have an issue for ten minutes or so and called me to apologise, assuring me they are doing all they could to resolve it.

Also this would be a starting point for my building a relationship with that person on the other end of the phone, and this occasional service issue could give the service provider an opportunity to call me a few more times to ensure I have not had this issue again and that I am happy with the way they handled the problem.

Service issues are a great opportunity to illustrate how generous you are.

You never know, they could go as far as giving me a little bonus for my troubles; if calculated carefully this trifling expenditure could be a most effective marketing tool for that company. I am more likely to appreciate this type of gesture than, let's say, an automatic monthly rate decrease, which might even go unnoticed by me and other customers.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

SUPPLEMENT #2

GREATNESS MUST BE MEASURED IN EVOLUTIONARY TERMS AND NOT JUST BY WINNING

I genuinely believe we are living in troubled times because our role models, and our definitions of greatness, are now based on wealth and fame. Traditional values have been replaced with where we live and what car we drive and how much we earn. It seems how much a person has is now more important than how they may have earned it. All that the younger generation is striving to achieve is status rather than high moral and ethical standards, as they used to, not so long ago. It seems nowadays the sign of achievement is all about material standards. The competition, therefore, is all about reaching a particular destination, without taking into account the method of travel. Just as long as we have X in our possession no one really cares how we obtained it.

The first sign of achievement is now all about a healthy bank balance, and the first thing we look for and ask is 'how much is a person worth?'

This is because our modern society's definition of greatness is misunderstood and mistaken for winning.

There seems to be no honour in struggling for survival and, more importantly, no honour in being a member of the struggling class.

My issue is that we have forgotten the key ingredient of greatness, which of course is in the details of a person's journey and how far they have travelled to get to their current position.

How dare we judge others' achievements when we have no idea of the storms that have destroyed their lives time and time again? How arrogant of us to assume that life is like a race with the same starting point for everyone involved?

Some people's challenge begins from the moment they open their eyes to the world. Their race and struggle begins when others across the world have already been handpicked to go to the best university in the country. Yet all we look for is the final publication of this year's winners and losers without knowing the details of their journey.

We live in a society where there is great emphasis on the notion of winning without understanding its real value and we often confuse winning with greatness.

To encourage the younger generation of our community I once introduced and publicly celebrated the lightweight British-Iranian wrestling champion on the stage of a live concert we had organised in London, only to realise later that he had won by default because he was the only participant in that category in the UK for that year. This is

an extreme case: becoming the British champion without having competed against anyone!

But there are intermediate realities in the world where someone is the winner but the great one is the loser.

Winning is just an outcome but ‘greatness’ is in the details of the journey

All great men in the history are praised and remembered not for the end result of their work but for the details of their struggles against all odds, emotionally moving details that illustrate their sacrifice and inspire later generations both to strive for the better and to overcome their own challenges.

Greatness is truly in the details, the details of a story of survival against all odds: the difference between a lucky lottery winner or someone born a millionaire and a self-made entrepreneur, whose sacrifice is unveiled only when we look at the details of their story.

But what is greatness itself and how do we spot and measure it?

Evolution, the most amazing story and inspirational achievement of all time, is a true story of ‘Greatness’ in its purest sense, because it is the story of struggle for survival against all odds.

That’s right; the greatest story of all time is the story of the little guys.

Evolution is a story of not accepting what life throws at us and not giving up; it’s a story of fighting for survival. And we humans are here today because there was always one species or one animal, less equipped and less fortunate than others, that was forced to do whatever it

took to stay alive, paving the way for the success of its later generations. A true story of do or die.

When you examine the story of evolution it becomes clear that we owe our existence on earth to a fighting force inherent in all living creatures which is directed by our innate desire to stay alive. The story of evolution is a story of a consistent move towards becoming, when we have to, just a little bit better than we used to be.

Some branches of life were less fortunate than others in their order in the food chain and they had a much more challenging life than others. On the other hand there was always a group of animals superior to the rest, for whom surviving was not a question but a given. They were the kings of the planet and everything came relatively easy to them. Change was not a necessity to them – not something they needed to celebrate.

But those other less fortunate animals needed to try new ways of life in their desperate attempt to survive, which, slowly over time, led to either utilising existing features which had been ignored, or taking advantage of new anatomical features which were the result of genetic mutations. This enabled them to take advantage of their existing or new environments, by taking to the sea or to the sky, and surpassing the ruling classes.

And that is the key; it wasn't the T-Rex who took to the sky but a much smaller and more vulnerable species.

Being part of the 'less fortunate' is in fact a gift, as it means we have a greater chance to explore and develop our talents and contribute to this evolutionary journey.

Really, which would you call great? The ruling T-Rex, because of its size, speed and strength, or the little animals that fought for survival against all odds? Although

not apparent at the time, let's not forget it was the latter which finally, out of sheer struggle and persistence, became us humans.

I can almost hear your thoughts. Some of you aren't convinced, and since evolution is the key to our story of the day I therefore suggest we explore it a little further to support my case.

The significance of 'time and 'need in the story of evolution

Don't get me wrong, this willingness to change or adapt is innate in all life forms but the key requirements are 'time' and 'need'.

TIME

Significant changes (such as the development of wings for example) do not come about overnight and altogether by accident. It's not as if T-Rex woke up with a wing one day, or even a half a wing, and thought it might be a good idea to fly although he didn't really need to but decided to try it anyway.

Such significant changes need time as they come in very small steps which take millions of years before that initial change even begins to look like a wing.

NEED

That being the case we now need a reason why the animal would encourage or even utilize the initial insignificant change and pass it on to the next generation. The only notion that could explain a persistent attempt to utilize even the smallest of changes is the animal's desperate need to survive. The animal's persistent attempts to make

use of this new undeveloped feature are what slowly but surely determine the development of something like a wing. Those first animals with that initial hint of a wing didn't even know what it was and what it could do for them, but their struggle for survival meant they tried everything in their power to stay alive and one accidental move began to utilize the miniwing feature, which probably added to their running speed or some other use beneficial to their survival, which over time became flying. Immature attempts at flying must have been carried out for a very long time before we got to a fully functioning wing.

Now that we have established the necessity of 'need', which animal do you think was most persistent to either take to the sky or to the land?

Those who had a reason to do so. Those whose lives were in danger. Those whose food supplies were slowly disappearing, either by natural causes or to other 'superior' animals, and those physically less well equipped or born into an age of possible extinction.

Those superior animals that were born amongst the ruling classes had no reason to change, adapt, or evolve. The crocodile is one example of such an animal whose achievement in evolutionary terms is minimal, because in over 65 million years it has changed very little – it has had no reason to do so. What if all life forms were so-called 'perfect', like the crocodile? Then we would not be here today as there wouldn't have been a life form desperate for change which would have resulted in later species and finally humans.

While the crocodile is ranked a marvel of the natural world, because it has remained the same for tens of

million of years, other less fortunate animals, whose survival no one would have betted on, had to keep on changing and live a painful life and finally become our ancestors, and we are now far superior to the crocodile and can, indeed, travel to the moon and back. We are for sure a far more intelligent and resilient animal than the crocodile, would you not agree?

Do chance' or luck play a role in evolution?

“What about chance and what about luck?” some of you are shouting at the page.

True.

Evolution in Darwinian terms is explained by genetic mutations, which come about by accident but prove to be significant to the animal's survival, as suddenly this new feature and mutation gives the animal new ammunition. So the animals that had a greater part of this mutation had a better chance of survival and this major mutation was passed on by the survivors to the next generation and so on. Hence a small change becomes a clearly identified difference between the species.

Accident seems to play a key role in this theory, in that animals do not initiate evolution and it is purely a genetic mutation created by chance. This could generate a negative outlook on life as it could suggest that we must surrender to 'fate and chance', and that we don't really have a say in the matter. That we should all do as little as possible while keeping our fingers crossed, hoping to become hosts of the next lucky strike.

If you think so then you are forgetting the essence of the story and the key drive that makes the animal utilize such chance events. The point I am trying to make is that

genetic mutations happen all the time, but in the early stages these mutations are not even noticeable.

It is the animal's struggle for survival that drives it to use every bit of any new feature for finding a new way to survive and for escaping extinction, albeit a feature suddenly acquired through mutation.

The king and queen of the beasts, Mr and Mrs T Rex, may also have experienced genetic mutations from time to time, but found no immediate reason to utilize them or explore these new opportunities, because they were the perfect killing machines and very good at what they did. When you are born with a perfect system, which enables you to survive with relative ease, there is little incentive to explore new environments, which would have resulted in the use of the new features you might have developed from such mutations. The king of the beasts had no reason to evolve until it was too late with far too little time for change.

I say it again; the difference between a simple genetic mutation and a full-blown feature, such as a wing, is the animal's desperate need to find a new way to survive – the less fortunate the animal the better.

That's right; this greatest story of all, evolution, is the story of the little guys.

So I go back to the point of this discussion and remind you that greatness is about struggle and about the less fortunate doing everything in their power to survive against all odds, and in doing so making a contribution towards this evolutionary journey. Greatness is not about where we are but about how far we have come, and,

in evolutionary terms, every little step away from our starting point and towards our long-term survival is a step of greatness.

Man's purpose and duty in the story of evolution

If you think about it the message is hidden in the interesting fact that at an individual level life does succumb to death, and more significantly on a species level sometimes the same applies too. So how has life managed to survive through the ages?

By ensuring that one animal's struggle for survival does not end with its death and that its achievements, no matter how small, are not kept a secret but passed on to the next generation, so they can benefit from them, build on them and pass them on to their own offspring. So you see, although the life of an individual animal will come to an end, the new feature will be passed on to the next generation for further development so that they stand a better chance of ensuring their survival.

We must do the same and share our knowledge and experiences with others so that our efforts for survival do not die with us but are passed on. For that is more important than an individual life. This is how we become immortal and join the legacy of life.

We are mortal beings and our personal journeys will come to an end, but we are also the biological guardians of this thing called life and while it is in our care we must make our contribution to its development before we pass it on to its next biological guardian, so that this gift of life can continue its evolutionary journey.

As humans it's our duty to continue on this evolutionary path, perhaps more a mental evolution than

a physical one now, and to pave the way for the later and more evolved versions of our current selves.

And the key to it all is our struggle for survival and not accepting our destiny and what life throws at us.

Don't make the mistake that has been made by many and think that the secret to life's survival as a whole is purely owed to the act of reproduction. Not the case. Without evolutionary changes the act of reproduction will do nothing more than produce a replica of the previous host, which will prove to be a pretty useless exercise when faced with an 'evolve or die' situation. Sometimes such situations are so immediate that the animal has not enough time to evolve and it will face extinction, all because it remained stationary in this journey towards perfection. So the most important factor of all is evolutionary change, a step towards a better self, in all forms and shapes, and something worth passing on.

To recap, greatness and achievement must be measured in evolutionary terms and not by one's current position or status, because when faced with crucial circumstances it's our ability to survive which will save the day.

To go up a single step is a far greater achievement than being born at the top of the stairs

So to those of you who have always looked at life as an unfair journey, where some are born having it all, while an infant in Africa might open his/her eyes to a world of poverty, I would say you are looking at this in completely

the wrong way, as evolution owes its remarkable journey to the less fortunate and to the underdog.

Don't give up because you think this is a world run by the powerful/wealthy class. You, me, and the rest of the less fortunate, are in the best possible position to achieve greatness and continue this evolutionary journey, through which, in small steps maybe, we are surely destined to achieve a role superior to those who are born at the top. Because in our struggles for survival we will develop abilities and skills that have been ignored or never noticed by the more 'fortunate'.

So to those who judge others by a simple 'winner' and 'loser' concept I say that *'winning is great only when accompanied by struggle but struggle is great even if you don't win'*.

Winning is an outcome and without knowing the details of the winner's journey it's just a position, with no intrinsic value.

To judge other people's success by looking at their financial status or fame is to ignore their evolutionary achievement or failure, for both of which we would need to know the details of their lives.

To judge greatness without knowing the details of their journey is like listening to a radio programme listing the boxing champions of a country that we know nothing about. All we get is a name and the position they came in. What it doesn't tell us is their backgrounds and, more importantly, the backgrounds of their opponents and any challenges they have had to overcome. Possibly very much like the champion we celebrated on the stage who had never fought anyone for his title.

I know this is not an easy pill to swallow. It's hard

to look at the comfortable class of society and find our comfort in the fact that we are struggling for a supposed purpose. You might be shouting at the page “at the end of the day isn’t life about happiness and enjoyment?” and “if so then how are we to experience any happiness or joy while struggling to make ends meet?”

I hear you. On an individual level does the ruling T-Rex really care about the evolutionary journey of the little guys? Given the choice which one would you rather be? Does anyone in society really care about where you have started from and what difficulties you have had to face to get to where you are, when you are always behind the rest? At the end of the day don’t we live in a society where the ruling classes have the pleasure and we have pain?

That is the case only if you look it on an individual level, but it’s not too hard to see past this individual journey if you view your connection to life on a grander level and understand how significant your struggle is. If the most important reason for our being is to contribute to this evolutionary journey, and if passing on our efforts to the next generation is our key contribution, then in effect the part of us that is being passed on to the next generation is the essence of our being. Therefore, by ensuring that our efforts are kept alive, our essence will be kept alive. This is how we know on an individual level that this journey is not about ‘me’ but about ‘us’.

It’s not too hard to understand that ‘I’ am what was once a far less superior animal during the reign of the dinosaur kings, who had to struggle for survival every minute of every day, and yet somehow managed not only to survive but to outlive them, generation after generation, until now, continuing its journey through me.

So you see! It's our duty to take the evolutionary step. Especially since we know that on an individual level we cannot escape death. What we must do instead is to pass the changes onto later generation, no matter how small a change we are talking about, and let them add a little to it and pass it on to the next generation and so on, until that initial change, initiated and encouraged by you, can become a significant and reliable change for later generations.

The nature of Man's evolutionary journey

It must be pretty obvious by now that the evolutionary journey that concerns us humans is not a physical one but a mental one. In our struggle for survival and doing everything in our power to get a step a head of where we are, we will be forced to educate ourselves and utilize brain power others don't have the need to explore. We will gain experience in relation to understanding ourselves and others around us because our survival depends on how effectively we can communicate with them. While others might buy the loyalty of those around them we need to make sure we understand and respect their wishes if they are to join forces with us, and of course this has a longer life cycle.

Through our struggle for survival we will become more aware. In having to go that extra mile to make ends meet we will come face to face with our own demons and fears and we will conquer them.

Being a member of the struggling class will force us to deal with ethical and moral decisions, as time and time again we will be presented with what might seem to be

an easy way out. Here is where we stand the chance of learning about true good and evil.

These are the evolutionary changes that are the key to the survival of mankind which we must pass on to the next generation so that they can utilize our experience and continue this journey.

Do you now see how significant and necessary is our role as the underdog? Do you not see how without our pain and 'struggle for survival' this evolutionary story cannot come to the end we deserve? The next time you are being judged by the disdainful gaze of society take pride at being a part of this unique advance. Remind them of how they would still be crocodiles if it weren't for the existence of the far less fortunate like you!

Take pride in all the challenges that life throws at you and don't for a moment question the fairness of the universe, as it is us who are the lucky ones in this painful position. Many find themselves in unbearable circumstances due to forces beyond their control, personal or business. You shouldn't feel hopeless, as this is the moment I have been talking about. You have been given the chance to struggle for survival against all odds but from all your pain and suffering will come a new evolutionary change, in the form of mental growth, leading to a better you.

All you need to do is make sure you are aware of the new you so you can consciously learn something from this journey, because human evolution is no longer about physical perfection but mental and you need to be aware of your mental growth and pass it on to later generations so they can build on it, instead of letting your experience die with you.

Embrace your difficulties. This is a 'struggle for survival' at its highest point. You are taking the role of our ancient ancestors whom the ordinary animals as well as the kings of the beasts regarded as 'nonentities' and pitied, yet you were the ones that led the way for the new branch of life that led to us, all because they had no other choice but to evolve. It was they who survived, not the kings of the beasts.

So look back at the world with a well justified arrogance, as you could be the next evolutionary step.

And to those of you who only judge a person by his/her financial status, I say again "greatness is in the details of their survival story, and unless you know where they started you won't know how far they have come."

So remember the lesson of the day. We are only as great as the challenges we have had to overcome and we should celebrate even the smallest achievement towards our survival, because 'winning is great only when accompanied by struggle and struggle is great even when you don't win'.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

PRINCIPLE #8

HAVING A GOOD TEAM IS AS IMPORTANT AS HAVING A GOOD IDEA

A person's passion and belief in their own ability for creating something out of nothing is what generally kickstarts a business venture. However, although the journey of an entrepreneur begins from within, it is the support from the outside which will ultimately determine the success of his or her initial vision.

This support will come from your chosen team; others who share your dreams and ambitions.

This is the case simply because you cannot be everywhere and do everything all at the same time, but a business has different parts which will need to be cared for and grown simultaneously. Potential customers who don't use your service won't wait for your return from a European expansion meeting for you to walk them through what you have to offer. Your suppliers need their invoices paid now, not after you have dealt with your sales enquiries and so on.

Sometimes a business is like a battle that needs to be fought on many different fronts all at the same time.

‘I will be super organised’ is not the answer.

‘I am exhaustion proof’ will not do here either

Regardless of how much of a hands-on approach you might have in business and regardless of how well you think you might be able to manage and direct your company by yourself, you will not be able to ensure the best possible performance from all the key sides of your business all the time. Even if we were to assume you could attend to your business every single working day and year in year out, the fact would still remain that in business there is no predictable order in which events take place to let you manage them by yourself, planning everything beforehand, and this means you will need to be able to offer the best performance on more than one front at the same time.

‘Wouldn’t it be great if I could have multiple versions of myself?’ and ‘If only there were four of me I would totally take the market by storm’ are not the solutions to this problem. Not just because these are impossible notions to achieve but because having people different from you, with different personalities and experiences, will offer the blend of varieties which a business needs in order to remain fresh and versatile.

Having the right team is the answer we are looking for.

I started my business journey with an idea which I couldn’t successfully get off the ground until I found my dream team members. The participation and dedication of these initial key

members energised the business in a way that I would have never been able to achieve either by myself or by having multiple versions of myself.

And so I realised the importance of key team members, and now, regardless of what I do, I always remember this vital but basic principle in business.

The notion of ‘team members’, as we will shortly see, goes far beyond your company members, employees, shareholders, and partners. The concept will include every single person/persons on whom you will depend for the survival, growth, and expansion of your business. This means the accountant, suppliers, contractors, bank managers and so on.

So choose your team members carefully, as having a good team is as important as having a good idea.

Don't employ people to do as you say, employ them to deliver what you want

Most people's version of a perfect employee is someone who will always do exactly what they are told. This is the ‘don't think, just do’ approach, and equally these people's idea of a perfect management system is to ensure their employees always follow this rule.

However, wishing for employees to always do exactly what we ask of them is in a way to wish for multiple versions of ourselves, because by asking them to do exactly what they are told we will be asking them to do things as we would. This means we believe only in our own conclusions and judgments, and only trust our own decisions, which leads to training our employees either not to think at all or to just think as we do, cultivating a lazy environment in which you will do all the thinking and others won't have to think for themselves.

I guess it's easy to fall into this trap of having things done in such a regimented way, because after all we know the business inside out and we know what works and what doesn't. Therefore we demand that our employees and team members execute the tasks in the ways which we have identified. "And what is wrong with that?" you might be asking, 'This is a business and your aim is to get the job just right, isn't it?'

Well, yes and no. Here we need to appreciate the distinction between the **destination** and the **path**, the difference between 'what we want to achieve' and 'how we can achieve it'.

The destination

In every company we will find a set of rules that sit at the heart of that business and act as the foundation of the company. These are sensitive rules that are based around the company's business plan and will ensure the survival and growth of the business. Such rules belong to the category of the destination. Examples of these rules could be your identified revenue stream for the first two years of the business, targeted customers for the initial phase and later phases, and so on. Due to their sensitivity these rules are not to be questioned or experimented with by other employees and team members. They can, however, be constantly reviewed and closely examined by the directors and founders of the company.

The path

In the same company we will also find tasks and rules that belong to the 'path' category – the category of how we can achieve the goals identified by the employers and founders of the business. The daily tasks of a business will fall into this category and examples of such tasks are things such as how to open a sales call to the pre-identified customer base or how to document your sales conversations.

What is in question here is our approach to the tasks belonging to the second category, the path.

The best possible path to a destination depends very much on the situation of the traveller. Not every path will suit every person and the perfect path will be revealed when we take into account the individual's background, weaknesses, and strengths. What you believe to be the perfect way of executing a task is based on how you would perform the task yourself; therefore it is based on your own abilities and limitations. When you are delegating a task to someone else the best results will be achieved only if that person is allowed to modify the task to suit his or her own style. This means they will perform the task much better than by doing it in exactly the way they were told.

After all what sits at the end of every task is the result, the successful completion and satisfactory end to the task, and the aim of your team members is to get you this result, even if it is in a way slightly or even completely different from the one you initially suggested.

Accepting change and allowing it to take place is not an easy job. You will need to let go of absolute control and judge the results rather than the method. With a little freedom and a hint of creativity you might be surprised to find how the new way works much better than the old.

The second benefit of accepting and allowing for change to take place is in how you will be able to break the routines of your business. As I said in a previous chapter, routine sits at the heart of decay in any organisation as well as of life in general.

No other story or case study can drive this message home more effectively than the story of the four monkeys with a banana and a ladder.

In an experiment, generally attributed to Harry Harlow, four monkeys were put in a cage with a banana hanging from top of the cage and a ladder situated under it. As soon as the monkeys saw the banana and the ladder one of them would climb up the ladder in an attempt to get the banana. However in this experiment as soon as one of the monkeys was about to grab the banana the person outside of the cage would spray all the monkeys with freezing cold water. After a number of attempts the four monkeys associated the banana with this unpleasant cold water experience and stopped pursuing the banana. After a while a new monkey was introduced to the cage and as soon as the new monkey tried to climb the ladder the other four monkeys would attack him, beat him up, and stop him from doing so, in order to avoid being sprayed. The experimenters continued introducing new monkeys to the cage, eventually totally replacing the original monkeys. So at the end of the experiment none of the four original monkeys were in the cage and yet if any new monkey tried to go after the banana the rest of the monkeys would attack and beat him up, without knowing why since none of the new monkeys had actually been sprayed.

Sometimes in business we either forget or actually don't know the reasons behind a certain routine. When we take a look at why we execute the tasks the way we do, we realise that while we have always been doing them this way, this seems to be the only reason why, just as Harlow's monkeys would beat each other up for approaching the banana without knowing why they did it.

Routines are always created to offer the best possible solution to a particular problem, but they are also based on the specific conditions/environment in which they were created. As time passes and companies change so do their conditions and environments, and yet the old routines remain firmly in place

because the employees are told to do exactly what is asked of them, which in this case will be to keep performing the routines.

As management changes and original team members get shuffled around or even leave, the remaining team members just keep doing what they have been asked to do, until one day someone will ask the question ‘why on earth do we have this routine’, and no one will have the answer.

Routines should be continuously challenged by the people who carry them out, because no one will know them better, but to achieve this you are going to have to create an environment where team members and employees can feel confident to exercise their creativity and learn from their mistakes. Not every change will be perfect and you will need to accept mistakes as a part of the package.

You need to set aside an hour every week examining the daily routines of your business and make sure you know why they are there and why they were created in the first place.

Make sure your new team members are made aware of those original reasons, because in this way they can understand the purpose behind the routines and this will give them new ideas on how to achieve the goal more efficiently.

In summary, do not employ people to do exactly what they are told, employ them to deliver results and let them come up with ideas and suggestions as to how best these results can be achieved.

Having the talent for talent spotting

What sits between an idea and a fully functioning business is the people who are going to carry out the plan. These are the individuals who will take responsibility for the different parts of the business and, as every entrepreneur will confirm, finding these individuals, cost effectively and quickly, is one of the hardest part of building a business.

In every business you will find two types of team member: individuals with 'specific skills' and individuals with 'general skills'. Those with specific skills are critical to the business as they will deal with industry-specific tasks and will have the technical knowledge and expertise that comes with years of experience in that field. If you have started your own business then it's safe to assume you have these individuals in place.

To grow the business however you will need individuals with 'general skills' too, team members who will deal with the day-to-day needs of the business, such as managing clients, issuing invoices, collecting payments, placing advertisements and so on. And as the business starts to grow you will need more of these reliable individuals to help you maintain this growth, both locally and internationally. Not being able to find such individuals is the reason why many businessmen/women don't manage to realise their initial dreams.

However, sourcing the right team members is easier than you may think.

To overcome this hurdle you have to develop a talent for talent spotting so that you can quickly and confidently execute your business plan. It's all about being resourceful; you will need to find affordable individuals on whom you can depend, individuals who fit within your tight budget, for carrying out sensitive tasks: people who are going to help you expand as quickly as possible.

Sure, at some point, when your business has entered the expansion phase and you are financially more comfortable and secure, you may choose to look to employment agencies to add to your ever-growing new team members, but during the 'building up' phase of the business you are going to need a more hands-on approach so that you can cost effectively handpick the initial members.

What you will get from an employment agency is the CV. But, contrary to what you may think, impressive CVs don't always mean 'the right team members', because a CV will only help you uncover what those individuals have done in the past and it won't tell you much about their future; very often also impressive CVs will equal expensive pay packages, which, on top of the agency fees, will turn into a costly exercise not suitable for most start-ups.

You will need to find these individuals yourself, and what you are looking for is someone who wants to change his/her future and someone who has a passion for building something out of nothing. Whilst a CV is all about the past you will need to look for something that can tell you about their future.

You are in effect looking for individuals who want to change their lives and want much more than they currently have, especially in terms of experience and achievement.

According to my colleagues I have always had a talent for easily finding the right people at the right time, people who have in time become critical to our operations and have helped us deal with our expansion plans, yet had been somewhat dismissed or unnoticed in their previous jobs.

This is not an easy thing to formulate but I think the following steps will certainly help you with your talent-spotting quest.

- 1. Look for passionate individuals:** Finding the perfect employee is often much easier than you might think as all you have got to do is keep your eyes open for people who go that extra mile in whatever it is that they are doing, individuals who take special care and seem engaged with their jobs. You can spot them everywhere – in restaurants, bars, boutiques. They stand out because unlike their colleagues these are driven individuals who take pride in what they do and do it with a sense of responsibility – the very recipe you need for turning your young business into a

success. Such individuals are waiting for an opportunity to become part of an exciting venture so that they can flourish and exercise their creativity.

2. **Establish whether they have the basic necessary skills:**
What you want from your dream team is to ‘work smart’ not hard. By working smart you will be able to achieve more in any given time frame, and for that you will need to utilise everything to hand. You must identify the basic skills that these individuals must have and use them as a foundation to build on for training them. For example, if you need someone to help you organise your sales orders it is important to find a person with basic computer skills, so that you spend your valuable time teaching them about the business – not how to work with a computer. They need to have the basic knowledge of the tools that they will use in their tasks.
3. **Ask them about their future:** What they have done in the past is important but not as important as where they want to be in the future. You could be that chance they have been waiting for – in becoming part of a creative, exciting, and challenging project. You need individuals who take joy in their achievements and get a kick out of making something work. And more importantly these are individuals who appreciate the value of lessons learned by working alongside an entrepreneur.
4. **Identify their ethical framework:** Trust is the most important element to consider when you are going to invite someone into your business and give them access to your customers and suppliers. You need honest individuals by your side so you can confidently put them in charge of different parts of the business. But how can we determine someone’s level of honesty and integrity? We can’t simply ask them if they are honest and whether they can be trusted, because almost

every single person will reply 'yes'. What you need to ask is for them to explain why they are honest and why they have integrity. What you will find is that people have a reason for their ethical and moral values, and by explaining these reasons you will be able to establish if they are pretending to be ethical or if they actually are. More importantly, you will be able to tell if their moral values are deeply rooted or susceptible to temptation and easily overturned. 'It's not nice to steal' is not the type of answer you are looking for. You need to engage them in an ethical conversation and let them explain why, for example, stealing is not good. Some people might find it difficult to logically defend their ethical beliefs but this doesn't matter as all you are looking for is the sign of a solid moral framework and not a philosophical debate on the roots of morality and ethics. Present them with hypothetical scenarios in which they are willing to break those ethical rules, as this will allow you to see if there is any consistency in their claims.

All the things that concern you about your potential employees will fall under one of the above, and if you are able to find individuals with the combined characteristics of honesty, passion, drive and the basic necessary skill, you will certainly secure the future of your company. With a talent for talent spotting you will spot your future team members in the most unlikely of places, as the world is filled with people waiting for a chance to achieve their potential, and you could be that chance.

The importance of delegation

Knowing yourself is as important as knowing the job and very often, because of overlooking their own limitations, passionate and driven individuals end up overworking and exhausting themselves. You need to teach your team members the importance

of delegation too. You need to teach them that asking for help is not a sign of weakness but a sign of strength and character.

Your vigilance and approach to business will be of great importance here. Sometimes in the midst of our struggles for survival we tend to focus only on the end goal and the end result, and perhaps we push ourselves and our team members to achieve these results at any cost. Maybe we assume they have the same level of endurance as us and we expect them to work at our level of intensity and consistency. Well, the key point to consider is that not everyone has the same physical and mental conditioning and a person's pressure threshold has a lot to do with their previous experience and training.

Your company is an extension of you as all its different parts are brought together to achieve your goals and vision, and working to your standards will be the sign of achievement for your employees. However, in their quest to conform to your expectations your employees will strive to become what you expect them to be and in these attempts they will overlook their own well-being and health which will result in physical and mental fatigue, and very often the signs of their exhaustion only become visible on their sudden collapse.

They need to ask for help without feeling ashamed and incompetent, and the only way they can achieve this is for you to demonstrate the value and importance of delegation and task sharing, a concept you must encourage every day at work.

There is another vital ingredient for achieving the above and that is your level of patience with your team members. For the sake of argument you need to imagine another analogy; you are an athlete with the aim of winning an Olympic gold medal, but to do so you must train and prepare your body, as your body will help you

achieve your mental goal. However for every athlete there comes a time when their mind wants to achieve more than their body is capable of and if they are not aware of this reality they will end up with permanent physical damage, because they have pushed their body beyond its limits. We need to understand our body and know its limitations and train at a sustainable pace.

Our team members here represent our body and we need to consider a pace suitable for them and slowly train them to improve their threshold so as to avoid any long-term injuries. A few months ago, after years of not having trained, I returned to the gym and had an intense 45-minute sparring session with another boxer, which I enjoyed very much. Later that day I noticed a pain in my left shoulder which I still haven't fully recovered from. In order to know whether you are able to spar for 45 minutes you don't do a 45-minute session and wait to see how you react, you must first do a ten-minute session for a few weeks and see how your body reacts and then slowly increase your session duration so that you can familiarise yourself with your body's strengths and weaknesses. Basically you need to be patient with your body.

Your team members are the most valued asset in your company and you must ensure their wellbeing and health, and to achieve this you must be patient with them and you need to encourage them to ask for help.

A family business doesn't have to be about the family's business

This is a lesson learnt often at great cost because family comes first and nothing is as important as holding on to your family ties.

An idea can develop into a family business for a number of reasons: for one there is that element of trust which we spoke about earlier. With your family members on your side you can confidently explore opportunities without having to worry about their being exposed to your money and business secrets, and

this encourages entrepreneurs to invite family members into their business. Another element is having the same interests and experiences where two or more members of a family are passionate about the same thing and decide to go at it together and split the tasks accordingly. And then, of course, you have the element of family support when you involve your family members in your business because they might be going through a tough financial and career patch. Sometimes the reason could be a combination of these factors.

Working with your family could be the perfect recipe for success but at the same time it could have a negative impact on your family relationships, something entrepreneurs often seem to find unavoidable. Hence the advice you may have heard before: ‘never work with family’.

Family relationships and dynamics are never quite the same as their business counterparts, and roles are often reversed in a business situation. There are cases where the younger sibling is the head of the company and will have to lead his/her older siblings. There is also the question of ‘it’s not personal, it’s business’ that can cause rifts in family relationships, because work issues very often find their way back into the family relationship and that family relationship is slowly replaced by a work one.

However, both scenarios can be avoided if you realise ‘a family business doesn’t have to be about the family’s business’.

I could expand on this issue for a few more pages but I believe the principle is self-explanatory and to the point.

The mistake we often make is to allow one relationship to overtake the other, so that a family relationship gets overtaken by a work one or vice versa, instead of making room in our life for both.

Think about it. If you had someone else working with you instead of your brother or sister you would have to make time for them in addition to the time you allocate to your family. This

would be two different types of people and two different types of relationship, and you wouldn't even think about it. However as soon as we start working with family members we begin to slowly replace the old sibling relationship with the new employer/employee relationship. What we need to understand and appreciate is that a business relationship is very much conditional whereas family relationships and expectations are unconditional. The two territories cannot be mixed, and this is why we need to treat each relationship separately.

To avoid any regrettable rifts in family ties you need to make sure you are allocating a dedicated time to nurturing the old family relationships, where they can be exercised and maintained.

The only way you can keep your business a business is to actually have something personal left to fall back on at the end of a working day or at the end of a working relationship. If this balance is not kept you will soon begin to notice the impact of your business issues at home, and the other way around, when the family's business, by which I mean family-related issues, find their way into a family business.

If you do work with family members then you must remember that you do, in effect, need to manage two different kinds of relationships and each needs its own dedicated time.

View your suppliers as though they were your team members

Team members are individuals who by definition either work with you or for you, and although I personally believe all my employees work with me I am forced to make this distinction in order to make the following point – widen your idea of who you can consider to be your team members.

A team member is someone who is helping your company to achieve its goals and in this respect there is no difference between your suppliers and your employees, apart from the fact that the former is working *with* you while the latter is working *for* you. But nevertheless they are committed to making your business a success, with the difference that your suppliers work with you on a commission-only basis and get paid when you purchase from them.

This means your suppliers are your extended team members. You can say they are your virtual team members. However unless you are their only customer you must consider the fact that they do service other clients and cannot focus all of their efforts on you and your company's needs. The delivery of high quality products sits at the heart of any business plans. Your suppliers will determine the quality of your products. Those suppliers are therefore one of the key significant elements in your business. You need to manage your suppliers in order to ensure the consistency of their service. They will also help you build tailor-made solutions which you can sell on to your niche markets. They are in essence what you sell and should be as important to you as your sales team; they are your 'behind the scenes' team members.

These reasons create an urgent need for managing, inspiring, and leading your suppliers to meet your business needs, and in order to achieve this goal and get the best out of your suppliers you would need to follow a few simple rules.

- 1. Know everyone from the receptionist to the CEO**
You need to get acquainted with your suppliers – everyone from the receptionist to the CEO – in a way you never thought necessary as each person can help you open a different door and it is your job to connect with them at some level and find your way through the company.
- 2. Know their strengths and weaknesses better than they do**
Not all service providers will benefit from the hands-on approach that comes with building a business from scratch,

as in bigger organisations they may often have had takeovers and acquisitions/mergers which can result in the CEO's lack of proper understanding of their own internal issues. This becomes especially noticeable when you are asking them to build something unique and tailor-made for your company, as this will require different departments to work together, perhaps for the first time. Not everyone will share your enthusiasm for reaching such novel solutions, and employees will always be employees, so you need to project manage your own projects in order to ensure their smooth progress. This can only be done if you know your way around their company better than they do and know their weaknesses and strengths, which will enable you to bring them together for a common cause.

3. Help them improve their quality and service issues

Nobody knows the quality of a service as well as a customer does and you are your service provider's customer and your daily experience of their products/services is a gold mine for them to learn from and utilise. What you know of their products is real time and live, whereas their experience could just be from tests prior to the launch. This could be anything from their after-sales support to their account management efforts, down to the quality of the actual product. By reselling their products you will become the link and the bridge between them and their end users, so you need to encourage them to ask for your feedback.

4. Have regular meetings with them

All the above can only be achieved if you have the right level of relationship with your suppliers and this means a balance between face-to-face and on-the-phone meetings. Apart from anything else, such meetings and regular contacts will help you understand their future plans and learn about any new opportunities they might be working on which they just

might choose to develop with you and not another customer. As we have mentioned, often your suppliers have more than one customer and this creates a competitive environment for attracting their attention. Bond with them and treat them like a team member and this will put you one step a head of the rest of their customers.

When you wake up tomorrow you must do so with a change of attitude and think of your suppliers as though they are your team members, and you need to take an active role in managing them in order to get the best possible product range for your company.

GLOBAL
professional
publishing

IF YOU WERE NOT BORN A SEA, WHY NOT BRING TOGETHER THE LONELY RIVERS?

Following a principle without any immediate results and certainty requires faith and belief. This is when you will put your inner voice to the most intense and awesome test of all. The only person that can encourage you is you.

And then, as the darkness of night seems to have won the battle over the light, a cloud clears away and a sparkling star brings tidings that reward for unquestionable faith is exclusively for those who believe.

So the beast bleeds! Now he knows and you know that victory is not just a dream. The absent orchestra plays the drums and as your heart beats faster and faster, the voice within you screams silently in joy “I can do this – I can do this.” Others around you will never know the inner revelation that has just taken place but they suddenly see a glimpse

of a half smile on your face, visible enough to tell the tale of a man who has seen the light.

There is no feeling more gratifying than achieving a goal that most have classed as impossible.

One of the main objectives of every business is to grow and the aim of every entrepreneur is to become a major service provider in their chosen industry. This is so because very often size can achieve profitability. A large business will be in a position to offer a one-stop-shop solution to its customers and maximise customer loyalty and profitability.

A 'one-stop-shop' strategy is designed to offer all that a customer would need under the same roof. Of course this doesn't mean offering all that customers would need in all fields and with regards to all their needs, but offering everything that a customer would need in relation to a specific field and industry.

You will usually find one-stop-shop solutions offered by companies who see a necessary link between these different solutions. For example, estate agents will also offer mortgage advisory services, as their client's business will depend on whether he/she can secure a suitable finance package to move ahead with the deal. In such cases businesses will most definitely offer a variety of end-to-end services to help their customers through each and every step.

This is a necessary case of offering a one-stop-shop solution, where in other cases it could be a complementary case. For example, if you currently have a restaurant you might also be thinking about offering a catering service to your customers for their external events. It's not necessary but it is related to your core business.

Both these cases will not only enable you to benefit from a new revenue stream currently out of your reach, but would also

create more loyalty within your customer base as they would be able to save time by dealing with a source they already know and trust. Even in the case of service providers offering a free additional service in order to grow the sales of their core product, such as the estate agents offering a free financial service to their customers, the ultimate aim of such a bundled package is to create additional revenue streams for the company.

As I have said the aim of every business to expand its product portfolio and offer as many services as possible to its clients, a characteristic evident in all major service providers.

To become a major service provider, however, is not an easy task. You are either born a major service provider, by which I mean one of the legacy type companies that were either government based or born out of massive wealth and in extremely fertile circumstances, or alternatively you can become a major service provider by bringing together multiple smaller organisations where the new creation is greater than the sum of all its parts, a recipe which enables you to offer a one-stop-shop solution to your customers and a variety of complementary services.

For us 'start-ups' or 'self financed businesses' the latter is the only option – a challenge that is often achieved by way of mergers and acquisitions. And to do that we usually need investment, which again in most cases is not an option for a start-up to consider.

But, although less official and perhaps far less glamorous than a proper merger, there is in fact another solution to our expansion problem.

Being a major service provider isn't about having a certain number of employees and offices; it's about how many different divisions you have which enable you to offer more than one service to your customers.

So how can we move towards becoming a major service provider with minimum costs and little investment?

A friend of your customer is a friend of yours

So how can you expand the size of your operation overnight without spending a penny?

The answer is simple: by joining forces with other companies who have the same problem as you and target similar customers as you. And I am not talking about your competitors either.

It's quite amazing how the workings of tens and hundreds of independent individuals are connected together by an invisible link, resulting in the existence and stability of a single entity.

This is one point that you probably know but have never actually thought properly about. As you leave your customer's premises and get into your car, your attention is focused only on yourself and everything you are immediately aware of. By that I mean what you can see, hear, smell, taste and touch, and in general, thoughts concerning you and your company, all related to the end goal you have been longing to achieve as a business – in other words a self-centred world. When you think of your customer all you can visualise is his/her relationship with you and your business, how you can become his/her preferred service provider and so on.

But if you were to pause for a moment, turn off the ignition, and remember that a falling tree would still make a sound if there was no one there to hear it, you will realise that what your company offers will only address some of your customer's

problems, not all of them. So much so that, irrespective of what you can do for that customer, there still remains a web of requirements vital to his/her existence which will determine their business's survival, requirements which your company (and perhaps industry) cannot and does not address. These requirements are provided by other service providers that your customer depends on, from one-man bands to corporates.

And this realisation will become the key to taking a giant step; you are not the only self-financed businessman servicing this customer, and you are not the only company whose world revolves around the same customer. You will realise how we are all rivers flowing in the same direction, independent and sometimes unaware of and indifferent to each other's existence, spending our daily lives servicing the same customer hoping to make a profit or simply trying to make ends meet.

What better criteria for choosing a partner for a joint venture than choosing someone whose world revolves around the same customer.

The feeling was quite strange for me when I first realised this point. I felt as if I was living in a parallel world with these service providers. There is someone else out there who needs my customers just as much as I do and strives to get my customer's attention to use his/her product. This person or company survives on offering a very specific service to this particular customer, and yet until today I have never been aware of his vulnerability and what goes through his/her mind on a daily basis. I have always known they existed but never given any thought to the quality of their lives. It's as if our paths just never crossed. But the magic lies in the fact that our lives are actually all connected, through an invisible chain, because without even one of us, the key ingredients in this business equation, the customer, could cease to

exist, the customer without whom I would have nothing to write about here.

This is absolute dependence. This is absolute co-existence.

We are the lonely rivers, flowing in the same direction but unaware of each other's existence.

As I begin to learn about them I realised how vulnerable some of them are, how weak and fragile they have become in their lonely quest to cater for my customers. What would he/she not give to feel the warmth and security of being a part of a bigger entity? And I remember my dream. I always wanted to become a major service provider offering a full one-stop-shop package to my customers. So why not bring all of us together, all those whose lives are targeted at the delivery of a specific service to this particular customer, all of those who share our drive and professionalism, so that we can offer a one-stop-shop solution to existing and potential customers under the umbrella of this new partnership?

Why not bring together all these lonely rivers and create a sea of our own? Why not join together and offer a variety of services to our customers?

By forming such a loose alliance we will be able to benefit each other's businesses. Let's not forget loose alliances have often been the foundations of great empires. Choose your partners carefully and the mutually beneficial agreement will serve its purpose.

Choose your partners carefully as their actions will reflect on yours

As we discussed above, all our customers depend on a number of services in order to survive and grow, services in addition to those

our company can do for them, and the question is how do we choose our future partners from this pool of service providers?

What are our selection criteria for choosing our partners?

A company or an individual who targets your specific type of customer.

Very occasionally you will find a business that targets each and every customer. Even if there are a handful of businesses out there with such product popularity, the fact would still remain that a start-up business needs to focus itself on a certain customer type. So you are looking for companies or individuals who target **your** specific customers.

You will need to sift through this web of service providers and exclude the requirements which your customer shares with other businesses, requirements which they all share regardless of their lines of business, and this will lead you to a handful of services that are specifically designed for your customer and other customers in this field, services that only this customer and others in this industry will use to service their end users. Services without which these customers would not be able to offer their unique selling point to their end users; services that address these customers' special business needs. And what we are looking for is service providers offering these specific services.

Let me explain more: the team efforts of any business are targeted at the delivery of a specific solution, and that means there is something at the core of that business which distinguishes it from just any business and groups it with its competitors. That business could be anything from a coffee shop to a sports shop, and in order for your customer to become and remain a successful coffee shop or sports shop, they would need to equip themselves with certain specific products that would enable them to deliver 'coffee shop' or 'sports shop' solutions to their customers, and

these products will be unique to their business and industry. These could be anything from 'coffee making machines' to 'sports shoes'.

And these specific services can be found by going through a process of elimination, because in addition to these unique services the customer would also need such common services as electricity. Electricity is vital but not specific because all businesses will obviously need electricity.

Therefore as we look past such basic services as electricity, we will see a layer of products/services designed to meet the unique characteristics of our customer's business. These could be products/services that address a certain age, gender, ethnic type, technology or industry, etc. These services will lead us to the specific service providers I describe above, and it is from these short-listed service providers that you should choose the potential partners for your joint ventures. Someone who is clearly targeting your targeted customers, where the customer type is your common ground.

Someone with the same professionalism and passion as you.

And then of course there is the question of brand power and brand association. You do not want to enter into any kind of joint venture with other companies or individuals whose involvement could harm or damage your brand. Don't forget you are the key figure in this equation and the most important factor is to protect **your** brand and reputation.

So what you need is a partner with a proven track record, someone who comes highly recommended by your customers. Ask your customers if they are happy with the level of service they are receiving from these companies or individuals. At the end of the day by announcing such joint ventures you are associating yourself

with that company's level of service. You should never enter into a partnership with someone who has just launched their business, unless of course you know them from before and are familiar with what they have achieved in the past. The start-up partner will benefit more from this partnership than you, as they will be using your reputation for establishing themselves in the marketplace.

Your challenge is to find another service provider like yourself who has been in the market for a while and has the same passion and level of professionalism. Together you will be able to take one step closer to becoming a major service provider.

Joint ventures can expand your business overnight

Joint ventures can truly help turn your fortunes around as you can expand your product portfolio and customer base overnight.

You can expect to achieve the following by joining forces with other service providers who target your specific kind of customers.

Delivering a one-stop-shop solution

By joining forces with other services providers you will not only be able to walk into your customers' premises with a product portfolio that covers more of their business needs than ever before, but you will also have a better understanding of what they have to go through as a business. Just imagine for one moment how powerful this concept could be. All you have ever known about your customers has been in relation to what 'you' can do for them. However, if you could somehow become wise to other challenges faced by your customers, through the knowledge shared by these new additions to your team, then surely you will be getting that bit closer to understanding all these customers' needs, and with this new formation, and a bigger product

portfolio, you can do more than just understand, you can actually deliver all these customers' needs and help them with their overall business strategy.

You can use your new one-stop-shop solution format to advertise your growth and expansion and service coverage, all of which will play an important part in winning new customers and maintaining existing ones.

Expanding the customer base

By joining forces you will be able to introduce yourselves to each other's customers and expand your customer base overnight. Think about it! The selection criteria for 'the lonely rivers' was the delivery of services specific to your customer base. All of a sudden you are teaming up with someone else whose life also circles around this customer type, someone who has a relationship with other customers in this field whom you have been trying to find and win.

Both you and your new partners also have your own competitors and although some of your customers may already be using your or your new partners' service there will be some who are using a competitor's. As a part of your joint venture you can introduce each other's services to your customers and introduce your customers to one another, and create a new revenue stream for both of you to benefit from. These will be new relationships which you have managed to acquire overnight through these joint ventures, an introduction you will both be more than happy to reciprocate.

Maybe you never thought about it but you have always been connected, and now you can unite and by doing so the value of the new entity will be greater than the sum of its parts.

In our case as we took our first steps in bringing together these lonely rivers we began to see the immediate impact on our business and the life of the new river. This has certainly been one of the most important steps we have ever taken in business and its positive impact on our team was visible from the very start – their spirits have been flying high ever since. And as a special bonus we have managed to change the life of one specific river which would have certainly ceased to exist without our encounter.

This is a principle I shall always put at the forefront of my mind – whatever and wherever the business venture may be. I hope you do the same.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

NEVER FORGET THE POWER OF NOVELTY – THE ‘GILLETTE FACTOR’

Man’s innate attraction to novelty is the cause of the rise and the fall of all new ideas.

This simple and yet powerful principle reveals the story of all businesses from the moment of their conception to the time of their death.

All customers will show strong reluctance to leave their existing service provider with whom they have a bond, a relationship of loyalty (especially noticeable where the customer only uses one service provider at any one time). This is the single most challenging hurdle for all new businesses to overcome – the winning over of new customers.

But as they say ‘life always finds a way to restore the balance’.

There is a powerful aphrodisiac in ‘novelty’ that draws us to investigate it further. Our deep yearning for change can turn into a kind of mass hysteria and all of a sudden a new idea and concept is overnight changed into the most ‘must have’ entity, assuming of course that the creators of the new concept know how to position themselves in the marketplace.

New relationships will be built, new conversations will take place, and an old routine is broken and replaced by a new energy.

Not everyone will want novelty as there are always those who like to keep to their old routines, and these are always the last ones to convert. But if the deliverers of the new idea can truly understand their audience, and can, at least initially, deliver what they promise, then even the most rigid will convert. Change becomes inevitable.

As a start-up and a newcomer you will have many things working against you, but the one thing that will work to your advantage is the power of novelty. The magic of 'novelty' will give you wings and you will start to win customers. They have been with their old service provider perhaps for far too long and will start to doubt – encouraged by your arrival – whether they are getting the best possible deal from their service provider. They will start to question whether their old service provider has abused the relationship and taken their loyalty for granted

This is the beginning of your business journey. You will be the next phenomenon everyone is talking about – you are now the new and exciting idea that will replace the old.

But if there's any truth in this then you too, in the years to come, will run through the lifetime of your novelty value and will inevitably have to succumb to the next new competitor. Novelty by definition cannot be eternal so you too will have a limited window of opportunity which you must make the most of.

Your novelty factor's life cycle will affect the duration of your business plan

Whether the aim is to offer a new idea or just a new way of offering an existing idea it is novelty that sits at the heart of the business plan and, as you can see, that novelty will have a life cycle where it gets overshadowed by the next new thing. This means we need to consider our idea's life cycle in relation to our exit strategy – by exit strategy I mean when and how one should get out in order to reach the desired end goal. This means every business

plan will have a limited window of opportunity, which in today's fast growing markets will be extremely short lived.

So how can we face this reality? Do we try to make the most of what we have as quickly as we can?

Some of you might say yes, because you think “that is OK” and that “As long as I get my fair share of the business then I don't mind nature taking its course”, in which case you will prepare yourself for a short-term business plan. This is not the correct approach. But before we go any further it is important to make a distinction between a ‘business’ and an ‘opportunity’. Certain movements in any market can create a short-term opportunity that requires a ‘get-in – get-out’ approach, in which case a short-term business plan is most appropriate. This, however, is not the same as creating a fully functioning business or a company with corporate aspirations.

No matter how hard you work, and how visionary you may be, it will take at least two years before you can call your business a proper business. It will take that long to build the necessary relationships with suppliers and customers, so they can trust you, and it will take nearly as long for you to find your areas of expertise (the part/parts of the business which can make you that life-changing return).

It will also take you a further couple of years to expand to the appropriate size so that you can take advantage of the opportunities you have now recognised to be the opportunities for you. And, don't forget! – market changes play a key part in this delay.

So realistically it will be about four years before you can start seeing a proper return on your initial investment.

Now depending on the size of your initial dream and financial goal you will need a further three to four years to make that life-changing profit.

This is not an exact science and you should never take the initial time frame too seriously as there will be surprises along the way, delaying or speeding up your project. All I am saying is that you must have a long-term plan in mind and never forget the life cycle of your novelty factor and be prepared to stick around for as long as necessary.

So how can we prolong the longevity of our business plan when its novelty factor is so short-lived? How can we make the business appear fresh, and new, long enough so we can benefit from its returns? If the novelty factor sits at the heart of our business plan, and if that novelty has a limited life span, then how can we realise our business dream which requires the business to last longer than its novelty factor?

Always remember the ‘Gillette Factor’

A business plan should not be about a particular novel idea but a series of novel ideas. The novelty factor should not be about one particular aspect of the business but something that emerges in the business on an ongoing basis.

The best example of a never ending novelty factor is Gillette.

The Gillette Factor

I call this the Gillette factor because Gillette to my mind is the mother of all novelty companies. They are constantly offering a new blade with a new functionality. So, although the company is old, the brand is always associated with the latest developments for our shaving needs. They don't give the competition a chance to come up with something new because they are bombarding the market with new products every season. Basically, in Gillette they are well

aware of their novelty factor's life cycle and combat this issue with continuous launches of new products that prevent the competition from taking over.

As soon as we have decided which blade we are going to stick to they introduce us to yet another new option to choose from. Our loyalty is not with their product, it's with their brand as we trust them to offer us the best possible solutions.

They have captured the market not just because they say 'this is the best a man can get' but because they epitomise their promise by not standing still. They are constantly upgrading their range, even though sometimes this only means a small twist on a traditional product.

Gillette are often able to refresh their novelty factor just by adding quite small changes to their existing range and using that change to launch a massive marketing campaign.

By relentlessly launching new product lines a company like Gillette is able to achieve a number of valuable goals.

FROM THE CONSUMER'S POINT OF VIEW

They are constantly offered a new and colourful product which keeps fulfilling the novelty attraction. So as I say above the brand is always associated with fresh and novel ideas and products.

FROM THE RETAILER'S POINT OF VIEW

They are faced with more than one product in the Gillette portfolio so they have to allocate more store and shelf space to Gillette products to ensure they have everything in stock – leaving less room for the competition.

FROM THE COMPETITOR'S POINT OF VIEW

Gillette make their lives hell by not allowing them to position themselves against their products and offer what could

possibly be a better solution. By the time the competition has worked out what blade to introduce, Gillette have brought out their new selection with yet another magnificent marketing campaign.

For us start-ups there is one more viewpoint to consider which often goes unnoticed, **the point of view of the service providers** – you and your team.

This does not apply in the case of Gillette but it will in your case as it has done in mine because our journeys for building an empire from scratch share this particular problem.

I had finally found a team who shared my dreams. They were willing to sacrifice everything so we could make them come true. They trusted me with making the right decisions and it was my task to show them that the future was ours. In addition to the key team members we also had a few nine-to-five employees whose loyalty to the company was essential, so the challenge for me was to make them see further than the actual size of the company and feel part of a growing idea.

Very often the actual size of a business does not represent the aspirations of the entrepreneur, and our challenge in these cases is somehow to make our team members see what we see and engage them in our visions of the bigger picture. Only then can we make them passionate and dedicated to the business, and only then can we make them believe in the plan. Your best team members and partners aren't always in it just for the money; I certainly wasn't. Sometimes this financial reward is a bonus for having exercised our creativity and passion.

The challenge every entrepreneur faces is to be able to make his or her team members see what they see and offer the creative environment we have just talked about, even when they are actually working from a small room in their homes and share

a single computer. This, as we will see below, is a hurdle you can overcome in your business by keeping alive the novelty factor.

Constantly breathe new life into your company – never let it stand still

You need to inspire your team members if you want them to believe in you and your dreams, and I did this by breathing life into my company by launching new products at least once a year. When I couldn't launch a new product I would at least make sure the company was expanding in a very new way by taking our existing products to a new audience.

There is a very fine line between 'sticking to what you know best and not jumping from one branch to the next' and 'branching out'. Keeping alive the 'novelty factor' doesn't mean going against the former. Of course you need to keep your focus on the core of your business and never deviate from your plan, until such time as you are comfortable enough to explore something completely different. When the goal of the initial business plan has been realised for instance. Until that happens you need to remain focussed and dedicated to your business plan and not get distracted by other hypothetical and potential opportunities.

Branching out, however, will enable you to come out with new ideas and new products without diversification or distraction from your core business. Targeting new customers for example. By new I mean perhaps a new type of customer from a different sector. Launch similar services but slightly tweaked to meet the needs of this new customer base. This will give you something new and fresh to work with, which will keep up the spirits of your team and will in turn give you a chance to work at new creative marketing campaigns. And of course nothing brings home the message of novelty like expansion into a new country. If you have the means then why not take your current business plan and

implement it in another country where there is a market for your product? It's like starting your business all over again.

These are new concepts which will bring with them new marketing campaigns and a new energy. Your customers will not be the only ones to witness your ambition and dedication to your goals. Your team members will also realise that they are part of an ever-expanding concept.

In Principle #1 we talked about the negative impact of 'routines' in a business. What we have just discussed will create a buzz in your work environment which will result in the breakup of routines, as new ideas and new marketing campaigns all require new strategies and plans.

So remember – always come up with new ideas and new products, or at the very least new versions of existing products, and above all never stand still. The power of the novelty factor will not only help you win clients from your competitors, but will also engage your team members with your ultimate vision for the company. You are going to need both of these from the start of your business journey.

PRINCIPLE #11

IN ORDER TO MAKE YOUR DREAMS COME TRUE YOU MUST FIRST WAKE UP

Despite having ability and talent, a lot of people fail to achieve their dreams because they spend most of their lives complaining and frustrated at the fact that the world doesn't give them a chance.

The worst part of it is having to look at some of the people at the top, who are enjoying the spoils of success, when we know we could do a much better job given half a chance. "It should be me up there doing that job and having the glory" we keep telling ourselves.

Well, maybe not.

The fact of the matter is that our lives are very much like watching a TV show, brought to us by a host of entertainers, superstars and politicians. The TV show is produced and managed by these gifted few, but watched by millions of individuals like you and me.

We live in a world created by others. It is they who decide the direction of our lives. It is these others who make the key

decisions that could alter the way you and I must live tomorrow. It is these others whose great achievements we read about and watch on TV.

We live in a complex society with rules and regulations, but what we need to ask ourselves is whether we have had anything to do with any of these structures and whether we have managed to make any unique or direct contribution to our society. If not then we are nothing more than a TV viewer whose only contribution is paying for a license.

This is a world where millions tuned in to watch the 'Rumble in the Jungle' and 20 years later a million others went out to buy 'When We Were Kings'. Where in this world do we fit in? Where is my place and who am I? This is a world where the thoughts and philosophy of one man can change the history of a nation or a region.

Now the insignificance of our lives is amplified because nothing that we do or say today makes the slightest difference to the world. We are just couch potatoes shouting answers at a TV set.

Who are these others that we all talk about, who don't even know we exist?

Do we all keep saying that life is unfair and that despite all our knowledge and capabilities the world isn't willing to give us a chance?

But, before we too turn into bitter old men in just the blink of an eye, we must remind ourselves of an obvious truth; *there is no audience in the mirror.*

The world doesn't give us a chance because the world doesn't know or care we are looking for one. The world does not see us through the mirror, only we do, and we can't blame the

world or others for not recognising our efforts if we are the only one watching our performance in the mirror.

The world is a better place not because Martin Luther King ‘had a dream’ but because he decided to share it with us.

So we must remind ourselves of what we have to do. The time has come to invite the world into our living room and show them what we can do, and it doesn’t matter how many might turn down the invitation just so long as a few are willing to come.

This is the first step. In order to make our dreams come true we must first wake up; wake up and pursue our dreams and actually do something about them rather than just complain that no one knows what we are capable of doing. We are the only ones who know those dreams. Unless we decide to share these dreams with the world, no one will come knocking at our door presenting us with a new life. We must make that new life.

We have got to wake up to the fact that the world belongs to those who are willing to take their chances and go after their dreams, not to those who have all the talent but wait for the world to discover them.

You need to believe that where you are in life now is the best possible place for achieving your dreams

The next step is to stop thinking about the past and believe in our hearts that where we are in life is in fact the best possible place for achieving our dreams.

Creating a business from absolute scratch, brick by brick, and all in the face of uncertainty, creating one that could compete with the market legends in their own backyard and make them think of your name at least once a day, is a task that requires years

of absolute dedication from the whole of you, your undivided self. This statement leaves no room for having regrets, 'what ifs', and living in the past.

You need to be 'regret free', not in the sense that you have never made any mistakes, but in the sense that despite all of these mistakes, you can look back on your life and say "I am still on the path to achieving my dreams." You should get up every day believing you are on the path to becoming the best you thought you could be, and wake up feeling happy about who you are and where you are in your life. Believing that where you are, even if it is still far away from your goals and dreams, is in fact still the best possible place for achieving them.

But how can any of us truly believe in this tale when probably every single one of us carries within ourselves a mental image of where we thought we would end up, which is often unrecognisable compared to where we actually are? How can we look at today and believe in our hearts that we are on the best possible route to glory, when we know, even if no one else does, how much better things would have turned out if, at certain key junctions, we had actually taken a different route? How can I dedicate the whole of myself to this business challenge when I am no longer in the category of those who are still able to achieve their 'ultimate best'? Am I instead a person who can only try to make the best of an average situation? How different does it feel to get up every day knowing that regardless of what we might do we will never be able to achieve our ultimate potential?

You think you might be able to ignore such a thought and get on with your job, but it will continue to eat you from inside.

No I don't want to be told that I need to settle for second best. I don't want to be told that this happens to us all and that all we can do is just try to make the best of what we have got. I want to know it's not too late. I want God to send down an angel, my own personal angel, to come to my rescue for one final time and

tell me I can still be as great as I once thought I would be. I want to wake up in the morning feeling that today I will take one step closer to my dream.

But angels don't age so they will never know the regret of a life-changing mistake.

With all this in mind, how can I offer this task the whole of myself? It seems as though I am suggesting we should live in denial – following a 'soothing' message preached by a bunch of 'couldn't make its' and followed by a generation of 'wannabes'.

Well, not at all – this is nothing more than a tale of simple misunderstanding.

A fact I had to remind myself of not so long ago when I was about to break down and fall apart. To have stayed dedicated to one task, for that long, and still not to have made it means there have been times when I thought I might have missed my chance. From all the personal and mental challenges that I have wrestled with, this, in particular, was the one I could never conclusively free myself from. Until that moment of course.

Below is the account of the conversation I had with myself earlier that evening which for me has forever brought this dispute to an end – I hope it does the same for you too.

I am a great believer that wherever I am in life is the best possible outcome for me, not because I believe in fate but because I believe in **me**.

Believing in something and actually utilising this belief to change your life are two completely different things. Take God for an example. Children may grow up believing in the almighty, heaven and hell, without this belief actually having any real meaning or impact on their lives. However there comes a point where this belief may come into its own and find its role in the believer's life when the all important ingredient of 'personal experience' is added to the mix. At that point their life transforms from theory into reality.

I am known for being annoyingly optimistic, energetic, and never giving up. This is what people may think, but what they fail to see is that I am all those things because I truly believe I am on the right path for realising my goals and dreams, and every day that I get up I will be taking one step closer to that certainty – a tiny ingredient that will hopefully neutralize the ‘annoying’ part.

I guess I have always lived this regret-free life, in the sense that I don’t think of where I could have been today ‘if only’ I had done ‘so and so’ all those years ago. However only now I know what this belief really means to me, now that I need this reality the most. At a point in my life when for the very first time I am beginning to see the doubters’ point of view.

As the gap between me and my dreams gets further apart I begin to break down and am forced to consider the possibility of failure.

My mind is cluttered with fear and I must clear all doubt through a process of elimination.

So I remind myself of my belief and write the following.

Almost every single person carries within them some regret about their past. They wish they could be given a second chance to undo those mistakes so that their lives could have turned out differently. If we were absolutely and entirely satisfied with where we were in life we wouldn’t wish for such a chance. So it’s always where we have ended up that makes us think about where we might have gone wrong.

Regret is not in the category of things that can be fixed by a genie granting us three wishes, because having wishes and fantasies has nothing to do with where we are and how we got here. Fantasies and wishes might be about wanting things that are simply impossible for us to achieve as human beings – flying perhaps or being able to have eyes in the back of our head. The same applies to wanting to have black eyes rather than brown or blue, as well as wishing we could win the lottery. Although

possible all these belong to the category of things that are not in our control, and therefore not having them has nothing to do with where we might have gone wrong in our life. It's not as if I could have had black eyes if I had chosen that job or could have won the lottery if only I had paid more attention in school, is it?

When I say 'regret' I mean the thoughts that enter our mind in those quiet moments when, without prior notice or warning, the harsh reality of our lives forces us to reflect on our lives and compare notes with our 'younger' and 'back in the day' selves. One by one they pass by. Our past plans and dreams all line up to march through our minds as though they had been longing for this opportunity to look us in the eye and ask us, with a sense of shock and bewilderment, what had happened to us and why had we broken our promise to them? It's true. At some point we slowly drifted away from our dreams and became separated, but although we get old they never age at all and will never be able to be anything more than just a dream, a forgotten dream which we bring back to life only on such occasional quiet moments. This is truly not the way to treat old best friends, is it? How I wish I could set them free.

My dreams and plans remind me not only of what I could have achieved but of who I used to be. They remind me of the younger super version of myself. To see him in my thoughts day after day, where he is not able to move past the final day of our separation, breaks my heart. It's like watching a movie without an ending, where the moment before the climax keeps playing endlessly over and over again. He deserved far better than what I had in store for him. How I wish I could set him free of this unworthy ending.

I know everything about him. How we were destined to take on the world together, all up until the moment I suddenly started looking at him from the outside, the moment when there became an 'I' and a 'him', when our unity was broken and I started to live a

completely new life but forgot to tell him and left him trapped in a time capsule waiting for my return.

When I look back at this younger super-version of myself I feel a pain which no painkiller can cure. It's a special kind of sadness, a nostalgia, sometimes even worse than losing a loved one because this specific type of pain rises out of guilt and regret. How did I commit this act of betrayal to the closest possible person to me?

So every night I sit behind my laptop, in 'T Blaauwhoof', my local bar in Amsterdam, and have an espresso while thinking and wishing I could find a way of setting him free, as it breaks my heart to see him never being able to be anything more than just a dream. How I wish I could set myself free of this pain which I know will haunt me for ever.

Being unhappy with my life is the indication of how differently my life has turned out from what I had planned for us, and I start to wonder where I went wrong and how I could have been much closer to the one I left behind. By unhappy I don't mean wishing to be him all over again, but being able to say I did what I set out to do and achieved my potential.

But I am here today and those days are long gone and there is no resemblance to where I thought I would end up.

There is nothing worse than not being able to undo a life-changing mistake.

However, as I am about to succumb to my fate and join the rest of the world in accepting the cruel reality of age, I see a glimmer of hope and I begin to see things differently.

There comes the moment of realisation, when for the first time in my older phase of life I realise that where I am in life is in fact the best possible outcome for me, and perhaps this realisation can help me to get on with the rest of my life, a regret-free life.

Maybe now I can sit down with my past one last time, look the person I used to be in the eye, and tell him how I will never

forget him, thank him for everything he has done for me, and once and for all say goodbye to him, so that I can embrace the **Now**. Maybe instead of looking back at my younger self with pain, sorrow and guilt, I can look at him as a 'part' of the whole of my life and not the other way around.

I can embrace the **now**.

That's right; I think I may have the answer.

The best time to pursue a dream is when you know its true value

I have been thinking about this in completely the wrong way, as today I am exactly where I was supposed to end up. Whichever way I look at it the fact remains that my life wouldn't have turned out any better regardless of what I might have done differently.

This is a key statement because if I can prove to myself that regardless of what I might have done I would have ended up either here or in a similar place then this notion of betraying my previous self and plans would no longer be the case.

To set myself free of regret I must be clear on what regret is about. Sometimes, lost in the midst of conflicting emotions, we often cannot tell what we are really depressed about, we can't tell friend from foe. So I start with a process of elimination to ensure that my emotional status doesn't affect my reasoning.

I can immediately disregard the regret of wishing I had taken a 'different route' in my life; I mean 'any other route' just as long as it wasn't this one, because the outcome of just 'any other route' could have easily been worse than where I am today. So if given the choice between a known and a complete unknown I would rather take the known because at least 'here' I am still alive, breathing, and able to have these quiet moments.

With 'where I am' there is the comfort that at least the worst did not happen, whereas with the unknown there is the chance that my life could have ended up with the worst possible outcome. So simply put, wishing for anything different for the sake of the difference has the same chance of being better as it does of being worse, and let me tell you, after all the hardship I have gone through I wouldn't want anything worse. So I am better off where I am.

Wishing to be born in a different country or era is wishing to be someone else, because the unique path which has brought you to this moment of regret would not have existed so there would be no you in the sense of the 'You' which we know. That is the same as the one above because you are wishing for something completely different without knowing anything about it. Wanting to be someone else is to take another's life at face value but knowing little or nothing of the problems they might be having, unless of course you were hoping to be someone happy.

Even if we overlook the simple fact that everyone's definition of happiness is different, it would still remain that this type of wish belongs in the category of the genie wish and not of regret because it's not something we ever had any control over so we can't regret not doing or having it.

Nor am I talking about certain events, which in hindsight, we wish we had participated in because we had the chance to do so, such as selling or buying shares in a company that has since flourished. Our lack of participation wasn't with complete awareness, or perhaps it is better to say we weren't aware of the future potential of that action. I can't regret not doing something when I had no idea of the outcome. To think you should have bought or sold those shares means you wish you were the kind of person who could have bought and sold shares without having the necessary knowledge, which means you would have had to make many other chance decisions with high risks of failure for just one

of them to be the selling or buying of that particular profitable share. I think you can guess where I am going with this one.

So what can be categorised as genuine regret?

Regret is the feeling we have towards a path we have taken or better yet a path we did not take when every fibre in our body was telling us to do the opposite. A major crossroads in our lives where we leave behind what we know best, all because certain other forces redirected our journey.

Regret is felt only when we had control over the outcome of an event but failed to act on it, in this case departing from the plans we once promised to follow through 'until death do us part'.

I used to wake up every morning and the person I would see in the mirror wasn't someone in pursuit of a plan or a dream that needed reminding or encouragement. The person I used to see was the dream. I was someone who was living every moment with his dream. My definition of the self was my definition of the dream. Leaving him behind and all the possible glory is my regret.

This is true regret. Having it all and being destined to change the world only to let it all become nothing more than a secret that only I know about.

But, for it to become clear to me that where I am today is the best possible outcome, I must change the way I think and I must stop focusing on what I have lost and think about one particular gain that has the power to change my outlook on life.

Today I know something that I could have never known when I was living the dream. Today I know the value of that dream just because I no longer have it.

Basically the moment we have the feeling of regret is the moment we know the true value of the subject of our regret. Unless we know the true value of something there is a great chance we will lose what we have. So the best time to have something is

only when we know how much it means to us, which makes that moment of regret the best possible moment to go out and get it. In effect losing the dream is an essential part of this process because unless we lose it we won't know its true value.

Therefore what I have realised is that the purpose of the first half of my life wasn't to achieve some goal or dream, but to fall in love with one and let it slip through my fingers without knowing its real value. All so that some day in the distant future, now, for the very first time, I can understand how much it means to me to live a dream and not to make the mistake of letting it go the **next** time round.

The more I think about it the clearer it becomes that if I hadn't departed from my plans when I did, I would have certainly done so at a later date. The fact that I let it go means I didn't value what I had and took it for granted, which means something, somewhere would have pulled me in a different direction and, no matter what, I would be still sitting here today writing about having lost it.

So given the choice which one would I take? Should I go back in time and rewrite the moment of my departure from my dream, knowing that since I never truly knew its value I would still have ended up losing it again at a later point in my life? Or should I take the road ahead of me today and restart the pursuit of the dream, now that I know how much it means to me and ensure that I will never let it go again?

The latter, of course.

But to claim 'that the best time to chase a dream is the moment we regret losing it' implies two further statements:

1. That all the great heroes, whose achievements have made ripples throughout history with their unstoppable pursuit of their dreams, were better off losing their dream first, so that at a later stage in their lives they could regret that loss and restart their pursuit.

2. That no matter what the dream, we are always able to come back and pursue it and more importantly achieve it after we have lost it, so that time is not important.

The two statements rather go hand in hand but both are false and misleading.

In pursuit of our dreams we must all travel unique journeys, and to compare one's journey with someone else's, our heroes' with our own, is to ignore the fact that maybe they weren't faced with some of the decisions that we were. Even if they had been, maybe for them living the dream was the most important thing in the world whereas for me other responsibilities took priority. To me greatness doesn't have to be achieved at a cost to others around me (a bitter reality evident in the lives of some of the heroes – for they may have changed the world of art, for example, but they did so by depending on their families till the very end or seeing their children die of poverty). This is why throughout history we have great men and woman reaching their potential at different stages in their lives. Some start from a very early age and keep going, nonstop, until they achieve their dreams (never losing the dream at whatever cost), while others come into their own much later in their lives, perhaps coming back to the dream when they realise the value of what they have lost.

So where does that leave the dreams that have a sell-by date? Because some dreams can only be achieved in a certain period of our life. If we miss that window of opportunity we will never get a second chance at it. We cannot start living these dreams any time we feel like it. For example the dream of becoming the world boxing champion at the age of 60 or becoming the youngest champion in history which by definition obviously means before a specific age and therefore impossible to achieve after that age.

Answering this question is the final hurdle for becoming guilt free.

Instead of having a £1m dream why not have a million £1 dreams?

Many fail to change their lives, simply because they believe they have missed their chance at achieving their dreams. Some dreams do in fact have a 'sell-by' date, in that we can only achieve them at a certain age or a certain point in time. So what happens to those of us who face such a dilemma?

It all depends on how we view our lives in relation to our dreams.

Who we are in relation to our age represents the relationship between a garden and the different seasons, where each season brings forth its own challenges.

Our life is not about living one particular dream but having the opportunity to live at least one dream, with the potential of achieving more. Each stage of our lives can and will have dreams of its own.

To fall in love with a dream and let it slip through our fingers is a lesson we learn at the highest possible price and yet with the highest possible reward, because it means we will know the importance of achieving goals and dreams the next time we fall in love with one.

OK, maybe I can never be the youngest so and so, but now that I know how devastating it would be if I was not be able to achieve my dreams, I will make sure the same thing does not happen to the next dream or dreams. And it's absurd to think we only get to have one dream, because, as I have already said, different stages in our life represent different seasons and each season has its own dream.

Therefore losing a dream can have a direct impact on achieving another, all because for the very first time we know what it's like to have had a dream and lost it. When I think about it, the

younger 'super version' of myself would still have a big smile on his face if I were to achieve a dream different from his, because all he ever wanted for me was to live up to my potential and show the world that he and I have what it takes to change our fate.

This is why we feel so invincible when we are young. What was so unique about my early years was that every single day I lived the dream. I was living it knowing in my heart that I was getting one step closer to achieving something great, something not everyone was able to achieve. This is the feeling of invincibility we experience in the early years of our lives when there is no other feeling like the power of 'absolute ability'.

But as we grow older we slowly start to doubt our ability to achieve our dreams, and one day we accept our fate and believe that it was nothing more than a dream. The invincibility starts to disappear and gets replaced by nothing more than a humdrum life. But the only true difference between being young and being old is the absolute belief in your ability to achieve greatness.

The secret is to realise that a person can, **and will**, have more than just one dream. The purpose of our lives is not to achieve a particular dream but to achieve 'a dream', **whenever and whatever it may be**.

I have spent many nights thinking about this to myself but what I have just told you will remain one of the most significant lessons of my life. That's right.

For me it's as if I am a teenager all over again and in love with what I do.

Because doing something with the belief that you can be its greatest expert is different from just doing something thinking it will never be anything special.

I can, once more, feel like my old self. How great it is to have that feeling back again!

Wherever you are and whoever you are, you must have a dream so that every day that you wake up will be another chance for taking one more step towards achieving something great, and tomorrow you must always be a little closer to that dream than you are today.

Never live in denial and always remind yourself of your issues

Iran, like all countries, has many rural towns and villages and often families from these provincial towns send their teenage sons to Tehran, the capital city, in the hope of a better life for them. Often these young travellers are illiterate due to a lack of education or schooling . And because they can't read or write they mostly turn to doing manual labour, mainly building work.

One day in Tehran, outside the city court, a young man who was a traveller from one of these towns, is waiting to hear the judges' ruling on a complaint he has logged against a group of men. Whilst anxiously awaiting to hear the court's decision he approaches a 'letter typist' to ask him to type a letter for his family- in those days you could always find at least one person sitting outside the city court with an old typewriter whose job was to write letters for the illiterate for a fairly small fee - a letter to a judge or a city department as well as their family.

This young and very nervous traveller approaches the typist and says, in a shaky voice, "I would like to send a letter to my family back in my village and tell them how I am doing and what I have been up to since my departure, so please type my words and give me the letter so I can post it." He agrees the fee and starts to tell his story.

Dear mom, dad, uncle, all the brothers, sisters, and cousins I hope this letter finds you well. I am doing OK too but have had a few ups and downs. When I first got here the only money I had was the funds you gave me which were your life savings. On the first day of my arrival a pickpocket stole half of the money from me in a busy marketplace. I knew that in a city such as Tehran the money I had left would not last me more than a couple of days so I quickly started to look for a job. The only job for which I am suited is building work and manual labour so I visited a few construction sites and finally started work in one of them as a junior bricklayer. They promised to pay me every week but after two weeks I still hadn't received any money. When I went to complain to the site manager and ask for my money he called over a few other workers and they beat me up and throw me out of the site. I eventually managed to find another job at another site and after a few weeks I managed to make more than what you had given me. But one day a few men cornered me in an alleyway and forced me to give them every penny I had and when the police arrived the same men accused me of stealing this money from them so I was taken to the police station. I am not sure what really happened but before I realised I found myself thrown in the city jail. I was there for a month during which time I was beaten up at least once a day by other inmates because they said people like me take away all their building work in Tehran.

I left the jail with a broken arm and no money and had to sleep in the alleyways or beside the canal, and because this was the coldest winter the city had seen it meant I became very sick and nearly died. I begged for food and clothes so I could get better and while recovering a few of the people who lived nearby turned violent against me and asked me not to sleep in their neighbourhood and when I tried to explain my

*situation one of them throw a brick to my head and ..”
As he is telling this story to the typist he suddenly bursts in to tears and starts to cry out loud and isn’t able to finish the letter. After a few minutes of nonstop crying the typist asks the man “why are you crying?” and the young man replies “I knew I had a hard life but I had no idea it was this miserable.”*

Many people have no idea how truly miserable their lives are and other people seem to have forgotten how fortunate they have been.

This happens because the routines of our everyday life structure can mask the bitter or the glorious reality of our situation and I have seen this all too many times where people are so consumed in what happens in the moment that they forget to reflect on how they arrived here in the first place.

For me this is my wake up call.

My life is like a battleground and every day I have to fight a new war. I have had to sacrifice every little part of myself to make this business work and have put the rest of my life on hold so I can become financially secure and offer this security to the people I truly care about, all before I can start to chase my own *personal* dreams.

I think about my problems and sit here in my favourite coffee shop every night after work and write my business journal, and to stay true to the cause I remain honest and tell it to myself as it is. As I begin to unfold the extreme difficulties of my journey and how I feel helpless, I start to remind myself that this is everything I don’t want to be and remember what made me choose this business journey in the first place.

We instinctively reject pain and seek pleasure and this mechanism, very quietly, starts to hide our bad memories and problems in a filing cabinet in our brain, in the hope that they will

be forgotten. Why should we think about these problems, and, as our friends advise us, why don't we just try to forget all about them and just live for the moment?

Well, we can either try to hide away from the realities that surround us and not think about them, or we can keep reminding ourselves of all the misery which overshadows our lives and use that as a motivation to do even more than before to achieve our goals.

Because, believe me, when I tell you that these troubles not only will not go away by themselves, through some magical turn of events such as we saw in the movie "The War of the Worlds" – but they will in fact follow us so that they can finish the job when we are older and weaker.

To me this is my wake up call.

I remind myself of how far I actually am from my dreams, so I can work a little harder tomorrow. Yes I regularly remind myself of the painful realities of my life.

It's either that or before you know it a 'once brilliant and life-changing' business plan will suddenly turn into nothing more than a nine-to-five job, and you will realise it has been ten years since the launch and you can't even remember why you chose this path in the first place.

Spend at least ten minutes a day reminding yourself of how far you are from your dreams. Remember the pain and constantly think about it.

Because your everyday challenge must be to get away from this pain as far as possible, one day at a time; for this every minute of every hour will count.



GLOBAL
professional
publishing

THE TWO PILLARS OF SUCCESS

Success, be it in business or in achieving your personal goals and dreams, is built around two main pillars. First you must identify the principles necessary to help you overcome your challenges, and second, you must have absolute faith in these principles and train yourself never to deviate from them even when the results are not immediately apparent.

Identifying the principles – The difference between knowledge and awareness

The task of any entrepreneur is to identify a number of key principles needed for overcoming his/her business challenges, and 'awareness' is the prerequisite for identifying these principles. But before we go any further I must explain what awareness is and how it can be achieved.

I have been searching for weeks to find a simple way of explaining the difference between two different types of people, one of which I believe to be rare.

I have been involved in business for many years and have worked with and for extremely talented, experienced and knowledgeable people, but in all this time, perhaps

due to my lack of experience, I have only a few times come across an individual who is aware.

It's not easy explaining this difference because it's more than just going that extra mile or taking your work home with you or willingness to sacrifice everything for the business or having passion and dedication.

The difference is all of the above plus one other.

Awareness

Awareness is different from having knowledge, and this is the key point.

Knowledge is something we have.

Awareness is something we are; it's a state of mind.

Being aware is to remember the existence of as many factors in an event as possible, as well as using these factors to re-evaluate your fundamental beliefs about the nature of that event. This is the shortest explanation I can offer on the nature of awareness.

Being aware is to be, at some level, connected and considerate of as many factors as possible all at the same time.

Being aware is the beginning of looking outside the box. I can give you many examples but ultimately **being aware** is to pause and reflect on a subject and take into account more than one force at work so that we can uncover principles previously unnoticed.

Knowledge is what we gather by observing and reading. Everyone knew that everything that goes up comes down. Everyone knew that the apple falls from the tree and does not ascend towards the heavens. But it took

one aware individual to consider the factor of being pulled down rather than falling down.

This is the essence and magic of awareness. Sir Isaac Newton was a very knowledgeable person but it took something over and above knowledge for him to have his revelation, since that knowledge was equally available to others in his time.

What was quite unique and different about Isaac Newton was that he was aware of his knowledge, and by that I mean he was constantly aware of the existence of as many factors as possible in connection with the event of the falling apple. This awareness gave birth to his theory of gravity.

Being aware of our actions, decisions, feelings and emotions, as well as being aware of all these factors in connection with the other parties involved in the business, will lead to principles which can be used in business. Taking into account the emotional and mental state of your competitors for example, or considering how your product is affecting your customers, and basically considering other factors other than how 'we' feel and what 'we' want to get out of our business.

Being aware is about looking beyond the obvious and finding new links and connections which will help us better understand the experiences which will, in turn, help us to achieve our goals. By finding new links and connection I mean taking into account points of view other than our own and trying to identify possible new causes in relation to an event. This way we will be able to see the world in a different light.

Being aware is an important part of our lives, a state of mind that enables us to be proactive rather than reactive.

By being the latter the direction of our lives and actions is determined by what happens to us, whereas being the former, proactive, we manage to take control and live our lives in line with our own plans and goals. In business the same rule applies. We can either just react to conditions and environments, such as increasing our rates to make up for the lost profit due to a drop in sales, or we can take control of our business and reflect on what we must do next, such as adding to our product portfolio or entering new territories.

‘Being aware’ is something we must work at as otherwise we can just go through life without being able to do anything about it. Two people can face very similar circumstances and yet only one of them will have gained some new knowledge to pass on. This again is the difference between being aware and just going through life without really knowing why things have turned out the way they have.

A business challenge is very much generic in that all entrepreneurs will face similar challenges but not all are able to identify the causal roots of their issues, nor are they able to see the solutions which they need to overcome them. This is achieved only if we manage to remain aware throughout our problems and issues, and only if we are able to identify and recognise as many factors as possible in relation to the circumstances which we find ourselves in. And this is what gives birth to new principles.

Going through an ordeal is a fantastic opportunity for obtaining awareness. You will come out of an ordeal as a completely different person if you manage to remain aware all the way through. People who have experienced

some kind of ordeal in their lives often view life in a different light, and that is because such experiences push them to examine their environments more closely and better understand the causes of their problems.

A business challenge will have its ups and downs too, and at times it may be one of the toughest experiences of your life. You can either shut down mentally, and become reactive, or you can remain aware and try to understand the causes behind your issues.

This is your task: to go through your business journey in a state of awareness, so that you can truly understand the nature of the challenges you face and see them from more than just a single viewpoint. This is a process that will help you to identify the new principles needed to achieve your goals, including the principles mentioned in this book.

There is of course a downside to being this aware and waking up with the same thought that you went to sleep with. A little while ago I turned up for a team meeting in our office with a black bin bag from my house. I had literally taken my rubbish to work with me. I had walked out of my flat, with the rubbish bag in my hand, had walked all the way to the office, got into the lift and gone up to our office suite, with the rubbish in my hand.

This has now become the famous ‘take your rubbish to work day’ in our company – initiated by my business partner.

Having absolute faith in your principles – Indiana Jones and the Bridge of Faith

Identifying the principles is only half the story and perhaps the easier part. What we need to do now is to put

our absolute faith in these principles and train ourselves never to deviate from them.

However, before we can go any further we need to clearly understand what faith is and how we can obtain it.

I will never forget the first words that came out of Dennis Pollard's mouth on his 'welcome to philosophy' lecture for us freshmen – "there is no logical proof that tomorrow the sun will rise again and yet we plan for tomorrow as though we are certain that it will." We live our lives dependent on assumptions such as 'tomorrow is Monday', or that 'night will follow day', or similarly, that the order of the seasons is immutable. These assumptions are all drawn from past experience and since we have never experienced any interruptions to this order of events we conclude this particular sequence of events to be an absolute.

But since such certainties are deduced from experience, our experience of night following day throughout our life, the only way we can be sure that tomorrow the sun will rise again is to actually wait and experience it happening. Therefore, naturally, this is one certainty which can only be proved by experience, defying the whole notion of certainty altogether, because certainty should not depend on experiences or tests.

For if by certainty we mean 'at all times' then it cannot be driven by experience, because we cannot experience anything for eternity just to be able conclude it does indeed happen every single time and 'at all times'.

"The only certainty is that there is no certainty", shouted a wise guy sitting at the back of the class; a paradox as old as philosophy itself. And yet, Dennis, amongst other paradox fighters, intricately plans his

tomorrow before going to bed as though tomorrow will for sure follow today.

We all do the same because we need to believe in some certainties in order to live our lives. These are, indeed, the principles of our lives.

Man has tried to discover the truth by identifying principles that explain the workings of the world we live in. However, since the only thing we can be certain of is that there is no certainty, all we can really do is try to introduce the best possible explanations for the workings of the world around us – A will keep happening as long as B is in place, and so on, knowing full well that the world could turn upside down at any moment.

So how do we keep living such organised lives in this whirlpool of uncertainties?

Faith is the answer.

We need to have a little faith, and actually we all do have faith. We just haven't thought about it in these terms. Faith is believing in the existence of something we cannot directly see or experience.

Although we can never be certain of anything, we are willing to take risks for as long as we believe we have the best possible explanation for the choices we are about to make. This is faith. Faith is what we believe to be the best possible explanation of the world.

However, faith is tested to its limits when dealing with something we haven't experienced before. I mean it's pretty easy to have faith in tomorrow's rising of the sun. After all it has proven very reliable so far as it has risen

for, as far as I can recall, 12045 times up until now without any exceptions. This is faith in history repeating itself. Again the actions of a joyful mother throwing her baby up in the air can hardly be called having 'faith' in the principle of gravity, as the mother has seen that everything which goes up must come down. But nevertheless this can still be called 'faith' as there is always that small possibility that the thrown baby will just keep on going towards the heavens. You see, she has faith, but it's so strong she no longer thinks about it – here is the border where faith and certainty become mistaken for one another.

But what about, for the very first time, holding a live electrical cable in our hands, 1000 volts – while standing on a plastic sheet? A different proposal altogether I bet.

This too is a very reliable principle based on scientific research and experiment. The plastic sheet ensures you won't be electrocuted, the result of a law of physics. But the first person who put this principle to the test had to have great faith in his own knowledge. Faith in the untested, faith in the principle. All the things we take for granted today, such as electricity or flight, were risky steps taken by individuals who put their faith in the principles they believed to be true.

The most difficult thing to do is to have faith in something we have never done before. Even if the teacher takes the live cable in his hand and demonstrates the principle, we are still extremely nervous when we are asked to do it.

But we close our eyes and put our faith in the hands of the principle and risk our lives.

This is faith in ‘the best possible explanations for the world in which we live in’, this is faith in ‘the principles’.

And this is the message of this book, having ‘faith’ in business principles which we can identify by way of reflection and understanding of ourselves, and above all by having awareness of the situations we are in and understanding the components of the tasks. Our business principles are based on the best possible explanation for the workings of our business world.

Sometimes in business, unlike the joyful mother I mentioned, we don’t have the luxury of learning from history and are faced with new and untested challenges that could mean the difference between success and failure. The right course of action isn’t always the most obvious one and often patience and pain are required before we can get the desired results. We can find ourselves drowning in a whirlpool of doubt and uncertainty which prevents us from fully committing to the tasks we face, which causes us to constantly change direction rather than remain focussed. Because when faced with the most mentally or physically challenging circumstances, where we see no immediate success, it’s easy to lose faith and let the gravity of the situation take control.

But never forget ‘good things come to those who believe’.

Here is where we need faith more than ever. As soon as doubt begins to fester, I remind myself “there is no certainty in anything, even in the rising of the sun, and yet I plan for tomorrow as though I am certain of its arrival.”

And I remember how easy it is to have faith when we believe we have identified the best possible explanation for our world. So I remind myself of my principles and follow them as though I am certain they will take me to my desired goal, even though where I am now is far from where I want to be. When I am at my lowest and there seem to be no end to my troubles I remind myself of the principle needed and commit fully to it as though I am 100% sure it will get me the desired results

This is how you are able *not to accept defeat*.

In this world of uncertainties, all we can do is identify the best possible solutions and principles, deduced from every possible tool, and put our absolute faith in them, giving the tasks our 100% dedication as though we are certain of the outcome. This is the only way we are able to withstand the pain; by knowing it is temporary and a means to a greater end.

Once identified, these principles will become the guiding light during our darkest hours.

There is a scene in the movie 'Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade',¹ towards the end, just before Junior finds the 'cup of Christ'. He finds himself standing at the edge of a chasm with no way across it. He then remembers a clue from earlier on and realises he can actually walk across this gap only if he truly believes, and thus he takes a leap of faith and starts walking over an invisible bridge.

Of course this is only a movie but the point it is trying to make is something easier said than done, because to have faith in something which we cannot see or directly

¹ 1989 movie directed by Steven Spielberg and produced by George Lucas.

experience requires us to change our belief system. This is different from just taking a chance. We can all take a chance on something without believing it, this is not what the point is.

To 'truly believe' requires faith, and to have 'faith' is to 'change the way we view the world'.

I will ask you to carry out one simple exercise so that you can properly appreciate the extent of this point: I want you to try and touch this page of the book by 'absolutely believing' you can put your hand right through it without touching the page. I am not suggesting this is something you can achieve if you truly believe. No, that is not the point and it's not even possible. The interesting point of this exercise is that as soon as your hand is about to reach the page you know you will make contact with the page and that you will feel it. It doesn't matter how hard you try, just before the moment of contact you are reminded this is just a futile experiment and that you will in fact feel the paper. Even if someone convinced you this was some magical phenomenon and that your hand would go right through the page, nevertheless you wouldn't actually believe. You would carry out the exercise as an unbeliever. To truly believe your hand will not touch the page would require years of practice, and here I am only talking about the belief itself and not the outcome of the exercise. And this is because as we said before faith is built around our best possible explanation for the world in which we live, and thus far the best possible explanation is that this page is made of certain physical elements that will make contact with my hand.

If however we were to make a new kind of paper, out of materials which we believe would react differently from normal paper, then it would be a different question altogether. It is then that we can put our absolute faith in the principle and try to put our hand through it without being reminded that our hand will in fact touch the page. Because once again having the knowledge of the new material, from which the second paper is made, our faith will rest in our best possible explanation for the world in which we live. We believe this new material does in fact work differently. So although we have never seen it done before we could be made to believe our hand would just go right through the page.

This is why a little while ago I placed 'having the best possible explanation' at the heart of everything we have faith in, even something we cannot directly see or experience, just as long as we consider it to be the most convincing cause for a certain event.

Now, what difference does it make if we have faith or not? Either way we will try to put our hand through the page and soon enough we will know whether it's made out of normal paper or some new intangible material.

The difference will show itself when we are about to attempt a task that will require our time and money – a task that plays a key role in our lives. In such a situation, if we don't truly believe, there will always be a part of us that will not be fully committed to the task, and at times, perhaps when we might be panicking, under pressure, or just getting tired, we will automatically behave contrary to the principle in question and will change our strategy to one that seems right at that time, a strategy that will prove to be the wrong choice later on.

It is during such times that we need to have faith in our principles, and the only way we can achieve such absolute faith is by reminding ourselves that these principles were initially identified as the best possible explanation for the workings of our business world, and further remind ourselves that in life we have faith in many phenomena for the same reason. Therefore all we need do is to treat our business principles in the same way as we treat the principle of 'tomorrow the sun will rise'.

By asking you to have faith 'during your darkest hours' I don't mean to paint a terrifying picture of business where only pain and suffering awaits you. Not at all. I actually believe this will prove to be the single most worthwhile experience of your life, one which will help you change your financial destiny while exercising your passion and creativity. However, what you must also prepare for is that in today's economic climate and competitive markets, creating a business empire from scratch will prove to be one of the most difficult challenges of your life. This is a journey that will confront you with your innermost demons and desires, at crossroads of uncertainties.

Having faith in your principles will become the key to your success

Just as it did for Indiana while contemplating making a crossing that could lead to his death at the edge of what looked like an abyss. By putting his faith in the earlier clues, which for him became the best possible explanation for that event, he was able to take that critical step and walk across the invisible bridge. Faith in what he believed to be a 'must', a principle if you like.

Our task therefore is to ‘identify the principles’ which best explain the workings of our business and to ‘put our absolute faith in them’ during our darkest hours, and stop questioning and doubting our decisions at every step of the way, so that we can keep our faith in the invisible bridge and act with absolute conviction in taking those final steps in the quest for our Holy Grail.

And I would like to leave you with a final reminder that in business, as in life, you may lose your faith in everything else but you must never lose your faith in yourself or in your principles.

GLOBAL
professional
publishing