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THE ULTIMATE SECRET FOR BUSINESS



10 Keys to
Maximum Profits
in Six Months
or Less!

“The Ultimate
Secret is absolutely
riveting; it's Business
Unusual from Australia's
leading business thinker.”

Tim Grizzle, Author of *Creating Wealth in
a Turbulent Economy*

Ainslie Waldron mba

Mensa Leader & Author of *Accelerated Business Strategies*

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10 Keys to Maximum Profits
in Six Months or Less!

SUTTON  HART PRESS

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10 Keys to Maximum Profits
in Six Months or Less!

AINSLIE WALDRON, mba

SUTTON  HART PRESS

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DEDICATION

Before I arise each morning I take a couple of minutes to still myself and give thanks for all I have. I direct my thoughts towards what is bliss for me and I ask for assistance in maintaining that splendid state. I then arise and enjoy the day, springing into action.

I dedicate this book to all of my children although you are now adults. You enrich my life, show me so much love and always believe in me. Your encouragement assisted me in writing this book. You keep me grounded, ensure that humor abounds in our house and give me limitless joy. It is truly a privilege to be your mum.

My life has been magnificently enriched by working with so many businesses over the years. I further dedicate this book to those impossibly resilient and wonderfully amazing breeds of people: the business leaders, the entrepreneurs, the visionaries who are on the front lines of the world economy.

P R E F A C E

WHAT IS THE ULTIMATE SECRET FOR BUSINESS?

It takes about 10,000 hours of practice to get really really proficient at something; whether it's golf, technology or business. Unfortunately most business owners, managers, and other leaders are put into "live or die" commercial positions long before they have put in the hours. Certainly they have leadership skills, financial experience, and other great qualities but they simply do not have the minimum hours required to achieve the extraordinary level of proficiency where they can quickly maximize the potential of a business.

That is where this book comes in; I have put in the 10,000 hours and then another 10,000 more, fine tuning and distilling what I have discovered to be the essence of business success. That essence is what *The Ultimate Secret for Business* is all about; empowering you with powerful tools and knowledge to take your company not just to the next level but to the highest possible peak of commercial achievement.

What do I mean by Secret? I have learned that almost every business has the seeds for great accomplishment; yes, even a local florist, print shop or hot dog stand for that matter can become forces to be reckoned with in their industries. But the Secret is that within the structure of any enterprise are unseen and unknown-to-the-owner opportunities as well as concealed or hidden barriers to the unlimited success possible in almost any business.

I will show you how to spot and overcome those secret barriers; then capture and maximize the complete potential of your business. So, the Secret is a quick infusion of knowledge and skills for the business leader. When you have the Secret your business can become that amazing dream you had the day you started the company, bought the firm, or took over the helm of an enterprise.

The Secret is the tool to make your business dreams come true.

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PROLOGUE

NO MATTER HOW GOOD YOUR BUSINESS, IT CAN ALWAYS BE BETTER

“The way to get started is to quit talking and begin doing.”

—Walt Disney

I want to share with you a secret; and not just any secret, either – *The Ultimate Secret for Business*. What is this *Secret for Business*? Simply this: whatever success you have had, whatever fame you have claimed, whatever profits you have made, once you have this secret you can and will increase those profits in six months or less!

In my experience, no company leaders ever want to rest on their laurels. Good companies want to be better, average companies want to break the “mundane ceiling” and be better than average and those companies who have been struggling for some time simply want relief so that they can begin to see their business dream come to life at last. There is a deep seated aspiration of any business owner or leader to have a Great company with a capital G.

What if I told you that, no matter how good your company is doing right now, at this very moment, I could help you maximize its potential in six months or less? What if you could increase your

sales, enhance your profits, eliminate trouble spots and otherwise race tune the business? That's right; in fewer than 200 days you could be reaching your business goals no matter what they are.

Most companies fall into one of the following three major categories:

1. The “good to great” company that wants to do better
2. The average company wanting to be better than average
3. The struggling company that can't quite seem to get out of neutral

What stops a good company from becoming great? What prevents an average company from being better than average? What stands in the way of a struggling company who wants to light out in fifth gear?

One thing: **roadblocks**.

If your company has hit a roadblock, if your employees are performing poorly or your success seems to have taken a detour, know this; your **success is less than six months away**. By systematically following the formulae put forth in this brief, easy-to-follow guide you *can* and *will* achieve success, one eliminated barrier at a time. Some of those barriers are obvious, others more subtle and the most challenging are invisible but you will be able to spot and break through each and every one.

All it takes to maximize business success is the information in this book plus a willingness to look at your company objectively with a critical eye, spot the barriers to your success and break them down one-by-one-by-one. Some might be painful to discover because you have missed them for so long while others will delight you in the simplicity of their removal. Then with nothing standing

in your way, success quite simply falls into place.

This book will show you how to do all three; it's a success blueprint developed by working with a thousand companies over many years and best of all, it's just in time for your company. Admit it; you have known for some time that there is something more to be achieved, possibly greatness and you know in your heart that you can make it happen.

Even better, there has never been a better time to streamline your organization and reduce the road blocks to your success. Whether your industry is racing forward right now or in the dumps, the true leaders in any marketplace are expanding at lightning speed and those companies that don't keep up – indeed, that are not actively working to get out in front – will soon be left behind. If this is news to you, it might be time for you to stop looking in the rearview mirror and hit the accelerator! Fortune favors the bold in business; at least the smart ones. Your new destiny is to lead the best possible company, whether 2 people working in a back room or 500 employees with 9 figures in yearly sales.

My name is Ainslie Waldron and for two decades I have studied and taught management theory, leadership strategies and success formulae; I have directly and indirectly assisted 1000 companies and I am known for developing groundbreaking accelerated business strategies that identify the maximum potential of any business and enable my clients to capture that potential in **six months or less**. It's a big bold claim and it is absolutely true; I love seeing it happen as company leaders catapult their company to the top of their industry – and beyond.

Why is having this timeline so important? Simply because it is human nature to start a project with good intentions only to let

it slip by the wayside with bad habits. We want none of that; we want you to treat this new business success just as you might a new product launch, and we want you to know just how quickly that success can be yours. In our experience the six-month time period allows you to make the necessary changes and do them well for lasting successful change.

You would never launch a new project, open a new store or enter a new territory without firm goals, an aggressive action plan and a specific deadline, would you? So why would you treat this path to your company's success any differently? In this book you will learn what it means to keep yourself, and your company, on a **firm timeline for success and to achieve this realistic deadline.**

And don't worry; you won't be alone. I have designed this volume as a resource you can return to whenever you need to check your progress or identify the next big action. Throughout my career I have developed a careful, critical and brutally honest "outside eye" for small to medium-size businesses and the people who lead them. If you are looking for false compliments on your management style, leadership philosophy or ten-year results, you have come to the wrong place. If your brother in law is failing in your marketing department, it's your fault. I'll tell you to reassign him. If a vendor is holding you hostage, you have to immediately straighten them out or replace them. I am not holding your hand – my function is to place the keys to amazing business success in that hand.

I know challenging things are facing you and sometimes all you need is a little bit of help to see what the blockages are. They are often invisible to management because managers are so close to them, they have become part of the scenery. You know how it is when you are living with something all the time; you actually don't

always see it, but as soon as you take a step back and look from a different perspective you *can* see it.

One of the things I can do – on-site and through the pages of this book – is remind people to take the outward step and then help them actually take that step. I can do it through my outside eyes because I have outside eyes. But, one of the things I always do is leave people with that ability for themselves, so they don't have to call me in again later.

My clients actually learn how to take that step back; how to become those outside eyes and you can, too. As a momentary outsider you can spot one, five or even quite often a larger number of things that you can do to enable you to achieve the maximum potential of your business **in six months – or even less**. You will note I keep repeating the “six month” timeline; the reason is I want to be sure you know we are not talking about superficial overnight fixes but also you should know that with reasonable diligence this timeframe to realize a surprising level of success is absolutely achievable. Expect it.

Along the way, my studies and client interactions have led me to identify the **10 Most Common Roadblocks to Unprecedented Business Success**. They are as follows:

1. *The Thing That Irritates You Most Daily*
2. *Tragic Person In Mission-Critical Job*
3. *Tech Guy, Supplier, or Key Employee Holds You Hostage*
4. *No Open Channel To Innovation or New Markets*
5. *No Time or Commitment To Learn*
6. *Self-Sabotage*
7. *Fighting Fires Instead of Fire Prevention*

8. *The Status Quo Trap*
9. *Waiting for the “Right” Time to Change*
10. *Listening to Other People Versus Doing What Other People Tell You*

Of course, there can be other reasons for business underperformance, but those are typically specific to your business and obvious to management. Here, I have identified the above as the most common partially-hidden reasons a business is not performing in a well tuned manner. Not every barrier is going to be present in every company; some might have more while others have far fewer. But, the truth is, even one barrier is enough to sidetrack your success indefinitely. These are the top-10 barriers I have encountered based on my experience with the companies I’ve seen; one or more of them is at work in your company and it’s time to put an end to them.

What’s important is to actively address your roadblocks. You now know you have one or more of the above barriers, perhaps even in addition to your own company-specific barriers and the first step is to address them. I’m quite confident that the tools and strategies you learn for solving the above barriers will be just as applicable to your specific issues.

Identifying these barriers is the first step to eliminating them; doing something active to eradicate them is the next. Both processes require different skill sets and, throughout this first portion of this book, I will address the identification of, and approach for solving, each barrier. You will have the skills and your company will benefit.

Whether a two-man firm or a larger 200 employee enterprise, what some people call my “gift” lets me quickly identify the stall points which limit business success. My true passion is helping

business leaders identify these blockages in their own firms, typically invisible to management, and then assisting them to quickly remove the barriers to open the door to a whole new level of business success. Executives and business owners then implement my Accelerated Business Strategies to maximize the newly possible business flow. It's quick and it's amazing and in my opinion was worth the twenty years it has taken to develop.

More simply put, I have made a career out of helping companies just like yours – and leaders just like you – create groundbreaking success in record time; typically six months or less. How? Simple: by showing you how to spot the roadblocks to your own company's success, then teaching you what to do about them, and finally giving you the key to taking your business to its next level and far beyond.

Some roadblocks are created by outside forces. The economy, the price of oil, the stock market, the latest Fortune 500 scandal or even the weather can all wreak havoc on your product, your personnel and your profits.

Other roadblocks we build ourselves. Making bad hiring decisions, spending too much time on one department while two others falter without your guidance or even launching the right product at the wrong time – or in the wrong market – can all spell failure if you are not careful.

The difference is not in who, or what, created the roadblock(s) in the first place; the difference is in **how you handle them**. Many of us swim in the river of denial so long, our company is literally drowning within shouting distance of shore. Others attack the wrong problem with the right vigor or, equally problematic, the right problem with the wrong solution.

People hire me because I can be that fresh pair of eyes stepping inside the company door for the very first time and spotting the roadblocks, barriers and detours to success with lightning speed. You are investing the time to learn *The Ultimate Secret for Business* and your reward will be to have the ability to step back and look at your business as would an outsider. Maybe you've gotten used to the bully who sits behind the receptionist's desk; I haven't grown accustomed to her surliness and I can spot her right away. More importantly, I will tell you how to help her help your company instead of hurt it.

Perhaps you have never dialed your own 1-800 customer service number before and are not aware that customers are forced to key in their account number (and other personal details) several different times or be prompted to say in a voice acceptable to the virtual voice "my account" loudly three or four times before finally reaching the right department, only to have to repeat it all once again to the first person they speak to at your company! (If it's been frustrating to read, try doing it live and in person- particularly with a funny accent like I have!)

With a trained eye and attention to detail, I can spot all these potential barriers to success quickly and help you respond immediately, but what is more important than pointing these problems out to you is making sure you see them for yourself – and fast. In this volume we will see exactly how to do it and where to look.

This book is called *The Ultimate Secret for Business* for a reason. I have the answers as to why some companies succeed and others fail and I know how these answers can become solutions to challenges within your company. This book is definitely not all

doom and gloom; rather, it's the reverse. It's a message of hope that your business will, with your willingness and effort, find unprecedented success.

You got into business because you wanted to succeed, to share your vision and product, service or idea with the world at large. You can still do that; fact is, with *The Ultimate Secret for Business* you will do it better, quicker and smarter than ever before. You can and will achieve every measure of success of which your company is capable.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

What if I told you that, no matter how well your company is doing right now, at this very moment, with just a few changes you could maximize its potential in six months or less? That's right; in fewer than 200 days you could be reaching your business goals almost without limitation.



PART

ONE



BLOCKAGES - 5 COMMON ONES AND HOW TO ELIMINATE THEM

The first two sections of this book outline – and describe – in precise detail the **Top-10 Roadblocks to Unlimited Business Success**. These roadblocks don't mean you are a “bad” leader or a “doomed” company; far from it. The amazing thing is that these roadblocks are present in companies big and small, across every industry during good times and bad. We are not looking to place blame or fault on management; rather we are handing you a blueprint for successes.

The reason these roadblocks are so hard to see is because they occur every day, often right under our noses, and yet we either feel too busy to address them or, for that matter, don't feel they are worthy of our attention because, in fact, they seem so small and not worthy of the brainpower it would take to deal with them.

You might think these roadblocks are painless, because your company is quite successful by most measures. You might think profits are up, or at least not down, so why mess with a formula that is working. You might even think, “Hey, if it ain't broke, why fix it?” But we know the truth; you are reading this book because

you know things can be even better and you are a maximum success sort of leader.

In fact, these 10 common roadblocks are often present in the most successful companies, even during the height of their success. As you will soon see, these roadblocks are not only common, but ever present. They are things you encounter every day, but perhaps overlook; things you may not know are going on, but are still costing your company valuable momentum. They are the primary difference between where your company is now and the greatness of which it is capable. Remember, “Greatness” can apply just as much to the local bakery or landscaping firm as it can to a multinational organization.

Again, to find a roadblock is not to learn that you were wrong or somehow failed in your position; it simply means that you are like every other business leader on this planet and you are ahead of most of them as you see it is time to identify, recognize and rectify the problems to start racing forward again.

Blockages versus Symptoms

So, we have named the 10 most common roadblocks but what are they? Well, first off, we should note that not all roadblocks are created equal. In fact, in **Part 1** I discuss the first five roadblocks, which I consider blockages; things that are literally “stopping up” your business and need to be eliminated quickly before the flow of commerce backs up and your customers, investors and partners are covered in, well, the consequences of that backup.

Blockages are just that; they “block” your flow of progress and cost you that valuable momentum that all companies need to move forward, move quickly and just plain move up.

Think of it in anatomical terms; when your nose gets “blocked up” your airflow is restricted and breathing – something that should come freely and naturally – becomes hard and labored instead. What was once easy – doing the wash, walking up a flight of stairs, making a phone call, breathing!! – becomes hard. You can’t run down the street, let alone a marathon, when your airways are blocked up.

Well, business is the same way; when blockages occur, what was once easy becomes hard; what was already hard becomes harder and some things become impossible. When success is “blocked,” the valuable lifeblood of your business moves slower and slower, blocking you off to valuable opportunities and slowing your progress.

These include such roadblocks as having the wrong employee in the wrong position or the lack of time to learn critical, game-changing new applications for success. These blockages can dwell and linger until the pressure is so intense that your personnel, department or company literally implodes; so spotting these challenges quickly – and solving them – is an important key to success.

As you can see, such blockages can be difficult to spot. For instance, having the wrong person in the right job may not show up immediately; he or she could look like they are on the ball, doing their job well, until the quarterly or semiannual performance reviews begin to come in and, POW; this person just wasn’t performing at all. Do you really want to wait a few months, or half a year, before you identify that someone else could have been doing this job better – much better – all that time? Just one wrong person in the right job can have far reaching consequences

throughout your firm from its supply chain all the way through to the customer experience.

In **Part 2**, I will cover the other five biggest business obstacles; those which are less visible or less obvious than the first five blockages and which I consider “symptoms” of bigger problems at large, things like customer service, vendor relationships and B2B (business to business) negotiations.

It is my experience that one, several or occasionally even ALL of these 10 roadblocks exist in nearly every company today; identifying them will help you understand how many you have to face and what needs to be done about each one to survive, overcome and then thrive. If it sounds complicated; it isn't when you have The Secret and you will discover the timing for repair, restoration and success is remarkably fast.

In the following five sections, I will share with you the keys to success for solving these solutions quickly, effectively and resoundingly. You will discover that while these roadblocks all exist in companies, they may not all exist at the same time and they typically do not exist to the same degree. Similarly, it will become clear that even having one blockage is enough to impede your progress if not derail your business completely.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Blockages are just that; they “block” your flow of progress and cost you that valuable momentum that all companies need to move forward, move quickly and just plain move up. Identifying them will help you understand how many you have to face and what needs to be done about each one to survive, overcome and then thrive.

IDENTIFY THE THING THAT IRRITATES YOU MOST DAILY

*“What one thing in your company makes you angry every time you think about it? What disturbs your sleep at night? What person or situation takes away that feeling of limitless potential you had on the very first day you started your business? That irritant is **the biggest roadblock to your business success** even if it seems a small thing.” — Ainslie Waldron*

Companies succeed every day. Chances are, your company is succeeding at this very moment. But could it have more success? Could there be more sales, more profits, more employee buy-in and better customer service?

If you're a reasonable business person you will surely agree that, no matter how things are going at this moment, they can always go just a tad better. And, if things aren't going well right now, we are going to work together to find that simple solution – or those several simple solutions – that will make it work...

No matter how big or small your company may be, unbelievable success is yours for the taking; right now, today and every day. The maximum amount of success is out there waiting for you to reach out and grab it. You've gotten past complacency because you're reading this book and you are ready to make a change which is step

one to amazing success. So often we see success as something off in the distance, whether it's a level of monetary success, sales success or even just an internal goal of success we've set for ourselves.

My work is the business of success; it's what I do, what I love, and what I offer is this set of very specific tools to bring you success in the here and now. Often companies are so blinded to their own inner workings and processes, due to proximity, mostly, that they can't see the blockages for themselves. My job isn't just to expose those blockages to you but to give you the tools to eliminate, and avoid, such blockages now and in the future on your own.

These are the keys to ultimate success. Eliminating these blockages allows you to reach those goals you've set for yourself without having to continually put out fires or find surprises or watch your progress slowly deteriorate.

Stop Letting the Little Things Drag You Down

If you are thinking it's some fundamental fault of your own that you are not achieving all you had hoped for when you started your business, stop right there. If you are worried that something big, bad and scary is at fault for your lack of success, don't be. In my experience, it isn't the big things that hold us up as much as those daily little things that drag us down.

That is why my seminars, conferences, and speeches are always upbeat and positive; this is NOT about any one terrible, horrible thing you or your staff may be doing wrong or some wicked, premeditated, evil fault of someone but, more than likely, each problem is typically a simple and definitely changeable difficult circumstance that is simply going undetected for whatever reason,

typically because you're trying so hard to succeed you simply aren't noticing the roadblocks just beneath the surface.

Business owners are often relieved to hear that merely by being more aware, being more observant, slowing down rather than speeding up, they can not only spot the roadblocks that have been holding them back but work through them in a much more simple and effective manner than they had ever imagined.

It is such a relief to spot a problem and fix it; it's so freeing to recognize what has been holding you back and, what's more, be given the tools to fix it – on your own – quickly and effectively. You will sleep better and your bankers will love you.

Awareness is a Necessary Secret to Success

One vital tool is always necessary to remove the roadblocks we're discussing: **awareness**.

If you are going to succeed at removing the blockages, barriers and road blocks to your success, you must first become **aware** of the most pressing issues that are affecting your company right now.

You may think awareness is one of your key virtues. After all, starting or leading a business requires a careful eye for your market presence, target audience, unique vision and skill set; even guiding a company through the years requires a keen eye and blade-sharp instincts.

But often what drives business leaders, at least most of those I work with, are the big things; the big picture. The business world is populated with “big picture” leaders. However, from time to time it is important to come down off the pedestal and see things from ground level. You see this frequently with the very best CEOs;

they're walking the factory floor – often; they're spending some hours on the front lines of customer service and they're talking directly to their customers.

Supervisors, managers and even your second-in-command can all provide due diligence and regular reports but if you sense your company is struggling in an area or somehow not achieving its full potential, you may have to take matters into your own hands. The good thing is that the tools presented in this book – the specific action plan and step-by-step guidance I'll provide – are ultimately replicable for every division, every department, every front-line employee and/or middle manager. Solutions are only a few steps away but they must be your steps, the steps of a true business leader.

For now, though, you're the one reading this book; you're the one responsible for this company's success, so I'm speaking to you when I say that, now more than ever, it is necessary to “sweat the small stuff” at your company.

Take the First Step... Now!

The single most important action to address right away is to eliminate those one or two things that irritate you most about your business right now, today. If this sounds simple, it is; but that doesn't mean it is not important. After all, whatever irritates you most today is going to end up being a major blockage to your business that requires eradication tomorrow.

The first step is being brave enough to admit that this blockage exists. It's often the most challenging part of the process to admit that all is not well in the customer service department, on the

front line, in the factory, or even in a corner office. But if there is something you know is bothering you, if there is something you simply can't deny, then it requires your attention, sooner rather than later. It is almost as if business people have an instinctual blockage monitor that shows up as irritation so why not eliminate these irritations by doing something proactive.

To date I have never seen a single blockage fix itself! Sticking your head in the sand and hoping that annoying receptionist will just go away is not going to solve the problem; only hide it and worse, only hide it from You. That is how barriers to success are allowed to persist: through avoidance or denial.

Awareness of the problem is the true antidote to eliminating the problem. Every blockage needs attention from you, first and foremost, to be brought to the attention of your entire team. Be brave enough to admit the blockage exists and deal with it.

So be aware that while the receptionist might be nice to you, this very same person could be hostile to everyone else and actually put customers off as soon as they walk into the place. How do you discover it? Maybe after bragging about her to your staff, you elicit some feedback and discover that she's not nice to anyone else. Or worse, perhaps she has a foul temper. You have likely met a receptionist that fits this description.

Instead of ignoring employee feedback as "sour grapes," consider the source instead. Are you going to believe how one employee acts to you over the considered and trusted counsel of several of your closest colleagues?

We can point out that problems not only reside at the lower end of the pay scale. Maybe you've finally broken down and hired that brother-in-law of yours for a job that you know is not

appropriate for his skills. Well, just being brave enough to admit to yourself that this had the foreseeable result of harming your business is a giant step forward.

What you have to recognize is that these seemingly “little things” can turn into big problems if they’re ignored or never fully addressed. Again, if your receptionist is snooty on the phone to everyone else but you, she could be turning away prospective business left and right. Prospects you don’t know about, prospects you will never be able to do business with because your gatekeeper was slamming shut the doors of opportunity. I don’t mean to cast doubt on the professionalism of the average receptionist; rather it is everyone’s first (and possibly last) image of your firm and the value of a stellar receptionist cannot be over rated. It’s not the spot for a person who makes a bad first impression.

Or, perhaps hiring your brother-in-law even seemed like a good idea at the time, but it created bad will among his colleagues because, after all, many of them had been lobbying for or perhaps silently hoping for this position all along.

Hiring externally might have taken the pressure off of you at home (no more nagging from your sister), but if it’s affecting you at work it simply can not be allowed to proceed. At least, not if you want to eliminate that barrier and open yourself up to success.

After all, every wrong person in the right position means the right person is sitting there, on the sidelines, underutilized and, frankly, is disappointed. How long before the best qualified employees you shut out to hire your brother-in-law take their exceptional talents elsewhere?

So now you’ve got two problems on your hands, not just one: a family member in the wrong position who resents you for putting

him there and valued employees who are right for the position resenting you for obvious nepotism and jumping ship! Tell me, where does it all end? It ends with your business taking hits until you stand up and fix the problem.

This is how little problems become major issues; because they cause a ripple effect that doesn't just impact one department, but all departments. Let's take the case of a snooty secretary, for instance. He shuts down all incoming inquiries with his mean cold attitude and lack of responsiveness, so as a result your marketing pipeline is no longer full. In fact, it is soon in danger of drying up completely, and worst of all you don't know about it or pass off any negative comment as a one shot thing.

As a result of this lack of incoming clientele, many other departments are in danger of losing funding as well, including Human Resources, Research and Development, Marketing and Promotions; the list is endless when the job leads dry up. If you're a five man company and an admin, brother-in-law marketing guy or even the receptionist is overtly negative, the entire company could be doomed.

These are just a couple of the many, many real-life examples I've seen throughout my career of identifying blockages to success – and helping companies eliminate them. Every company is different; every solution is the same: **you must start somewhere**.

Where? The single most important action is that thing that irritates you most daily. Start on it and be brave enough to admit that that blockage exists and must be eliminated right now. Once you decide, once you take that step, once you move up that ladder, then you can continue and you can grow from then on. Remember, we've got six months here to get your company to maximum success. Start now.

Respect the Five-Foot Rule

Leaders often feel overwhelmed because of the sheer magnitude of fixing a long-festering problem. The most dangerous thing is that almost anything can be put off for “one more day”. Wait for enough days and it can actually be a shock to the system to realize how far the implications of a bad hiring decision have gone. Other times business leaders are simply too busy to fully address those issues that are holding them back. My quick, simple solution for this is **The Five-Foot Rule**; in other words, look five-feet in front of you and ask yourself, “What is bothering me the most right here, right now?” It is time to engage that intuitive business sense of what’s wrong – it appears as bother, another term for irritation.

Yes, I know, five feet is not a lot of space to give yourself. But if you are keenly aware of what is happening in any given five feet, you are bound to see more than you ever imagined. After all, five feet is plenty of space to stand behind your receptionist and hear how she treats first time callers as well as those from established clients or customers, and it is more than enough room to watch your inept brother-in-law in action! Note here that I am not attacking brother-in-laws, many are fine people with great skills but in my example he’s mis-assigned as the marketing guy and botching the job with reckless abandon.

Remember, the things to check out don’t have to be huge issues. In fact, as I said before, they can be downright simple or so they seem to me after seeing the same small problems at company after company year after year. If the noisy water cooler just outside your office is driving you crazy, chances are you are not alone and the constant humming, clicking and mechanical belching could

even be affecting employee morale and, as such, their productivity. Replace it or get rid of it altogether; problem solved! A great morale booster and irritant removed for under \$200, and all in five feet or less. Can you imagine how much simple beneficial change you're going to create in just a couple of months?

On the other hand, if *nothing* in that five-foot radius is bothering you, Congratulations! But don't stop there. Now walk *another* five feet and ask yourself the same question, "What is bothering me right here, right now?" It may take five-, ten-, fifteen- or even fifty-feet before you spot your most vexing problem, but of all the problems you should identify and eradicate first, the closest one would be it.

The beauty of this process is that eradicating roadblocks is truly an addictive experience. Believe it or not, reprimanding or eliminating, or reassigning your receptionist or brother-in-law can be truly freeing for both of you. One roadblock down and likely more to go but you've started the momentum!

Yes, success really CAN be just that simple. That's why I always point out that it is the little things that count, one by one, and add up to either great solutions or big, bad headaches.

You may not think a faulty water cooler or an ineffective phone system or a family member on staff can mean that much to the success – or failure – of your business, but just ask the person who sits closest to the water cooler and has to hear it whirring, stopping, spitting and chugging all day long; replacing it can literally mean the world to him!

Or just ask the loyal qualified employee who now gets that promotion he or she deserved all along, but that was put on hold for a few months – or longer – by hiring your family member in his or her stead. Everyone loves to be recognized and rewarded with a new and better posting.

The reason little problems are allowed to persist in the first place is at least partially because we underestimate them. A water cooler? There's no money left in the budget and that's beneath you anyway? You'll consider it in the annual review. A snooty receptionist? Well, her review is coming up in a few months, we will handle it then. My brother-in-law isn't performing? Well, take it up with my sister, how bad can he be anyway!

And yet, cumulatively, one, two or all three of these seemingly insignificant roadblocks can cause huge barriers to your success, be it in employee morale, lack of marketing follow-through or even employee retention.

That is why it is so important to first be **aware of Barrier One**, then to become **specific in how you address that barrier**.

Be Specific, Be Successful

Let's face it; you picked up this book because you wanted relief from some sort of corporate grief and the idea of maximum, yes maximum success in **six months or less sounds like just the thing**. Being vague or indifferent will not help you achieve that goal. Generalities won't help at this point; you have to take specific, smart and measured actions.

You can't merely say, "We're in trouble; we need help." To effectively create relief you must define what "trouble" means to you; not in general terms such as "we're not doing well" or "profits are down" or "morale is low" but, specifically, WHY you are not doing well, WHY profits are down and WHY morale is low.

When you ask yourself why isn't the company doing well? This statement is so indistinct, it's hard to even get a grip on it. You have

nowhere to focus and no solution seems possible so the easy ones don't even come to your attention. And, what does "well" mean? Financially well? Emotionally well, physically well, are you not doing well when it comes to customer service, meeting demand, the supply chain – what, *exactly*, isn't going well? When you define the problem, solutions become not only visible but in reality much clearer. Even if the solution is challenging, defining the specific problem makes it that much easier to solve.

Use the 3-I Solution

Problem-solving starts with **knowing**; but real success, the kind you're hoping to learn from this volume, starts with **doing**.

So let's do something, right now, to start solving your immediate, most pressing problems. In addition to **The Five-Foot Rule**, my **3-I Solution** can help any company, no matter how big or how small, no matter how smooth-sailing or troubling progress has been to date. The 3 "I"s ? **Identify**, **Inform** and **Initiate** problem-solving procedures to maximize short- AND long-term success:

- 1. Identify:** To solve any problem you must first know what it is. Identification is key to eradication. We have seen how being overly general or going too wide in scope can be less than helpful, so the smart business leader will do the opposite. You must be specific; be *very* specific. Don't say, "Customer service is bad." Instead, say, "I've got a hostile receptionist on my hands; she is the source of more than 50% of my customer service problems." Or perhaps your employees are being too idle, taking longer and longer

lunches and driving down workplace efficiency, etc. Maybe production is declining, safety is becoming an issue on the factory floor or you're seeing increasing waste in the Human Resources Department. The first step to breaking down any of those specific barriers is identifying each one, specifically.

2. **Inform:** Once you have identified a particular issue (before you go off in too many directions I have found it's best to **identify, inform and initiate a solution** one problem at a time), now you need to inform the person or department that you are aware of the issue and that something *will* be done about it. Often, this pronouncement, if presented in a "let's work this out" manner, can be enough to fix the problem straightaway. It is best to remember that many problems come about as a result of protracted unawareness. In these cases you are unaware of the distinct problem (or its specific source) so it is allowed to persist; but, and here's the secret, now that you know about it, have recognized it and spoken the main issue aloud, the problem can a.) Either resolves itself through a chagrined but self-starting employee or b.) Be resolved by you and/or someone you put in charge of resolving it forcefully and with results.

Either way, the solution begins with formally informing the offending party in a pleasant but firm manner, either privately if it is one person – such as a rude customer service rep or negligent custodian – or collectively if the actions of an entire department are at issue. After all, maybe your receptionist thought you wanted her to be "firm" on the phone and doesn't understand the value in solving each caller's problems individually. By informing her of how you

specifically want her to act, she can either see the error of her ways and do as you desire, or realize that's not her cup of tea and go be snooty elsewhere! But how will you – or she – ever make that mission-critical decision if she isn't informed of the problem?

- 3. Initiate a Solution:** Finally, devise an action plan to solve the problem; then initiate it. The fewer steps involved in the plan, the better. If a customer service rep is being rude, fix it in three steps or less. If a department is being wasteful, find no more than two to five options to address the issue. The worst thing you can do is identify a problem, inform the problem-causer about it and then... do nothing! That sends precisely the wrong message and makes your sudden awareness something less than serious (at least to the employee). This tells employees that you're just blowing off steam and, as soon as you go back into your office, things can get back to "normal." Only their normal is what's slowing you down, so you have to create a new normal by initiating a solution; and you do that through specific actions that initiate an effective solution. The solutions I use and you will learn about throughout this book are special because they work quickly as they are effective and immediate. The worst thing you can do is take six months to solve each problem! We are taking your business to its maximum potential in six months and this means you will need to make every Secret your own and take immediate action on each to achieve that goal.

When you use my **3-I Solution** you can begin doing something actively about your blockages right now; today. The best part is,

this system can be used with every problem, no matter how big or how widespread.

In summary: Got a grumpy receptionist? Great; at least you have identified the problem. Now you can inform the employee – or department – that the problem exists, that you know about it and that something needs to be done. Finally, you can initiate several steps to eradicate the problem – or the employee. For instance, you might have the negative employee shadow a positive one for a whole shift to see how customer service is done right. You might let the employee know a “mystery caller” will be calling at different times on three different days for the rest of the week. There are a number of strategies to implement once you have used the **3-I Solution**.

The point of your exercise is not to show people who’s boss and who has power, but to eradicate a specific problem. You can’t blame the person in HR who hired the lousy receptionist or the janitor on night duty for the sins of the day shift janitor. You have to be specific in both your praise and your reprimands, otherwise both are useless.

The beauty of this **3-I Solution** is that it drills straight to the heart of any matter through a specific filtering process that is unique to every problem, every individual, every situation, and every solution.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

No matter how big or small your company may be, unbelievable success is yours for the taking; right now, today and every day the maximum amount of success is out there waiting for you to reach out and grab it. All you have to do is implement the Secrets you learn in this book and step one is spotting barriers; action follows and you’re on the path to maximum success.

TRAGIC PERSON IN MISSION-CRITICAL JOB

“It is one of life’s tragedies when a great person finds themselves in a job not suited to their temperament or skills. Business success disruption, damaging personal psychology on the part of both manager and employee, and negative team morale are the logical results of having the wrong person in a key position. Repair a bad fit and watch that area of your business blossom.”

— Ainslie Waldron

There are few bigger obstacles to success than having the wrong person in a mission-critical job. Business challenges are hard enough when the right person is in the right job; when wrong meets wrong, problems only begin to compound themselves on a daily basis. Spotting and fixing these potentially business-fatal misalignments is the very foundation of the next Secret for Business.

For every wrong person on the job, one or more right people are waiting in the wings in your company or at least within your sphere of influence. How long will they be patient? How long will they wait for you to come to your senses? Unfortunately; within your company and without, many others will spot this before you do. We have already seen the massive ripple effect of disappointed

expectations, ruffled feathers and bruised emotions when the wrong person is put in the right position.

No One Ever Wins the Blame Game

Whose fault is it that the right person ended up in the wrong job? Don't be too quick to put the blame on yourself, or anywhere, for that matter; many factors go into employee placement and, after all, what is done is done. In reality if you are going for maximum success in 180 days there really isn't time for blame and often it's counterproductive anyway. It is more important to focus on the possibilities for the future than the sins of the past. What business or government for that matter couldn't be much more efficient if they followed this simple Secret maxim?

We have all seen the many times when employees are hired to do one job and do it so well that they are promoted into a job that's no longer suited for their specific skills. For instance, a person who flourishes at making cold-call sales out in the real world may be stymied by the confines of a 9 to 5 desk job. It's also the basis for the truism that people are typically promoted one step beyond their level of competence and this is tragic for all concerned.

Often even the employee doesn't realize the job is wrong for them – until it is too late – and this applies just as much to all levels of a large company as it does to the five man shop. So how is their supervisor, the HR manager or even yourself, for that matter, to blame for a simple set of occurrences that led to an employee being great for one job – but miserable for another? The only resolution is to solve the problem as soon as it becomes apparent a mistake has been made.

Unfortunately, too often the employee is afraid to speak up for fear of losing his new job; they assume they will figure it out if they just keep quietly trying. Also they are afraid they might not be able to go back to the old position because someone else has taken it or they are concerned about potential embarrassment in front of their former peers. Meanwhile, his or her performance suffers and it is often months before the employee is exposed as inappropriate for the job.

To avoid such problems in the future it may help to start a program in HR now where within a fixed amount of time – say a 30- to 60-day window – the employee can “shift” back to his or her old job if it is not working out. No harm, no problem; every promotion is a trial effort for both sides. Although this flies in the face of traditional business thinking, I believe one Secret for the evolved company is taking the fear out of admitting a mistake has been made; and letting everyone move on sooner rather than later with minimal disruption or personal embarrassment.

In another example, consider the case of a brilliant analyst who is suddenly forced into a position where she is speaking to large groups of employees. While the job itself may not trouble her, speaking in public may force her to literally face her worst fear every single workday. It's proven fact that the fear of public speaking rivals or exceeds the fear of death for the majority of people. Both of our examples are hardly ideal for employee performance, but more and more common. How often do we see great line workers fail at middle management? Or great middle managers fail after being promoted to the corner office? Other times busy Human Resources Departments see employees as numbers and perform under a one-size-fits-all mentality that, frankly, suits no one.

The “Wrong Person” Does Not Equal a “Bad” Person

Don't confuse the issue of the right person in the wrong job for a bad employee who is no longer worthwhile to the organization. Bad employees are a whole different matter and it is no Secret that you must excise them from the company roster instantly. Often great people are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time; this does not mean they should be fired, merely transitioned to where their skills can blossom and flourish – even if that means going back to a previous position or being transferred out of a specific department.

Likewise, don't treat sending people back to doing the job they were good at as a demotion; this negative stigma can keep the wrong people in the right jobs longer and cause bigger problems down the line. I have learned there is nothing about your company as valuable as the people that make everything happen. If you can agree with this simple statement, your employees, partners, investors, and customers will sense it and this Secret will help your business in a thousand subtle ways.

How do you know if you're facing the challenging road block in your own business? If the signs aren't obviously clear, you might think its good news. After all, if things are going smoothly, why create waves? And that may very well be the case. Unfortunately, poor employee performance can often “hide,” lurking in files, records and reports until the end of the week, the month, the quarter or even at the end of the fiscal year.

That is why identification of this potential barrier to success is so important and why it should be an every day task of your supervisors or yourself in a smaller company. Clearly, you can't

be everywhere at once, but such edicts come from on high. So to avoid letting the wrong people linger in these jobs, give your supervisors the tools and the motivation they will need to spot such roadblocks sooner rather than later.

Here is one Secret tool you can put to use immediately:

The 4 Signs of the Wrong Person Being in a Mission-Critical Position

To determine whether or not a good employee is simply in the wrong mission-critical position, look for these four signs:

- 1. Poor attitude:** Few employees who are struggling in their current position can feign happiness forever. Eventually an employee who feels misplaced, unappreciated or even overwhelmed will reveal signs of tension, stress or unhappiness. They may confide their fears to their coworkers, show physical signs of anxiety on or off the job or reveal sudden shifts in work behavior. Be on the lookout for a poor attitude which can manifest itself as lack of focus, disheveled appearance or even outright disdain, particularly in new hires and/or transfers. To make identification of this challenge even easier, you may want to insist that supervisors meet with new hires and especially new job transfers once a week to make sure everything is going okay. Such “meet and greets” might seem like a hassle or unsuitable waste of time at first, but the value of this effort becomes immeasurable when compared to the lost time, energy and effort that results in replacing someone who’s unhappy – or unqualified

– in their current position. Spotting and diagnosing a poor attitude is a critical secret for business success.

2. **Periodic absences:** If an employee who previously had a spotless attendance record is suddenly missing one or two days every other week, this can be a telltale sign that they are unhappy – and obviously unproductive – in their work. Even if an employee who was formerly a go-getter – arriving half-an-hour before work every day and leaving later than everyone else in the afternoons – starts suddenly watching the clock and being a strict nine-to-fiver, this can be indicative of sudden job dissatisfaction. Again, closely monitoring new hires or transfers can likely eliminate things getting to this stage.
3. **Declining performance:** Poor employees tend to have flat-line performance; where this starts is typically where it ends – poorly! But the right employee in the wrong position may start out strong (trying his or her hardest to adapt because that's their work ethic) and then stumble, gradually over time, to where their performance – when charted – can be identified on a downwardly sliding scale. Some employees try so hard, for so long, that they can literally mask their failure through sheer busy work – at least to the untrained eye. As we all know, busy does not always mean productive, and close monitoring of job performance is as important – if not more – than activity.
4. **More complaints:** Putting your ear to the ground can be a great way to informally survey department heads and coworkers or customers about declining performance in employees who might be in the wrong position. If a

supervisor is receiving more frequent complaints about an employee from his or her colleagues, this can be sign one that you have the right person in the wrong job.

Talk it Out Before Writing it Off

Okay, so you've identified the right person in the wrong job (or vice versa). So, how to remedy the situation? Talk to your people in a smaller company; or have your people talk to your people in a larger one. You will be amazed at what employees will tell you if you **simply ask them**. Almost everyone is eager for the chance to speak to their leader, even if it's to tell them they want a job transfer or they simply aren't happy in their new position.

Never underestimate the power you wield – for good or ill – when you initiate a simple conversation with your employees. Most people are dying to speak to you, to communicate with someone in charge, to find a solution to their problem; if only you'll let them.

Obviously, company size is an issue when communicating with your team. It's simply not realistic for a Bill Gates or Steve Jobs or Michael Dell to go up to every new hire or job transfer and ask, "Are you happy in your current position? Is there anything you'd like to tell me?" I understand that, but if you are a small company with a more relaxed atmosphere and/or intimate staff, then certainly do this yourself and it can become a surprisingly high-payoff use of your time; another secret of your successful management.

If company policy or practicalities prevent you from doing this personally, at least focus on each department in your organization and task them with being on the lookout for employees who simply don't fit their present role.

Again, specificity is key; this resolve is toothless if you simply say to your department heads, casually, at your next meeting, “Oh, by the way, be on the lookout for low morale or job performance in new hires.”

Really? *Who* should be on the lookout? *What* constitutes low morale? Or job performance? How “new” is a new hire? One month? Two months? Two years?!? You need to designate one specific individual in each department to be your point person on this. You need to alert them specifically what you would like them to be on the lookout for in employees hired or transferred, say, in the last six months.

Giving general instructions for a specific problem is a sure way to guarantee failure across the board and going to the trouble of identifying a sore spot in the organization – and then doing nothing about it – is nearly worse than not recognizing the problem at all. Don’t just alert your people to the problem; give them the tools to actually do something about it.

It’s Always the Right Time to Succeed

Timing is everything; this much we all know. But when is the right time to determine the course for your company? When is it okay to let the wrong person in a mission-critical position hinder your progress? Or is it ever okay? You already know the answer to these questions but it’s time to face them and do what you know to be right for the company.

When your business is amidst the organized chaos of a “busy season,” “product launch” or other big project, it is easy to decide to put problematic employee challenges that aren’t on fire, off until some later time.

Although seemingly the right decision, i.e. just keep the machine running until we get through this season, this launch or what have you, there could be nothing farther from the truth. If the wrong person is in a key position, **take care of it today**. Your company will benefit short-, mid- and long-term.

Trust me; the costs – of every sort – are too high to wait until later. Be proactive, be specific and be decisive. Your company's most valuable resources are its employees. Give your company and its people the respect they deserve; a right person in the right job will have a rewarding experience and the company will prosper.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Don't confuse the issue of the right person in the wrong job for a bad employee. Often great people are simply in the wrong place at the wrong time; this does not mean they should be fired, merely transitioned to where their skills can blossom and flourish. Take the time to identify misaligned people; then help them get to the right place – it's a secret for maximum success.

TECH GUY, SUPPLIER, OR KEY EMPLOYEE HOLDS YOU HOSTAGE

“You walked away from a high-paying job, missed your child’s last soccer game, worry about payroll for two or two hundred employees, and make other sacrifices to own or lead this business; but someone has the nerve to hold your business hostage! When an employee or supplier disrespects you because they think they are irreplaceable and then act untouchable – fix it instantly or replace them. You will be surprised at the positive results.”

— Ainslie Waldron

Over the last two decades I’ve advised management at almost every kind of business, from restaurants to retailers, from art dealers to auto parts manufacturers, and there is an all too common problem: **a key employee who is not properly participating in the flow of company goals or operations.**

Take my word for it: ANY employee who is not performing his or her duties, who is withholding, delaying or eroding your progress, who is holding you back, who is not letting you move forward, who is hostile or superior, is literally holding your success hostage. In my opinion these people, and there is usually one or

more in every company are nearly as bad as armed thugs putting a gun to your head; these people are threatening the success of your business and the professional satisfaction of everyone around them.

It's easy to focus on things versus people; it's easier to blame the computer crash on the computer rather than the snooty tech guy who hasn't been doing systems checks or, worse, who wanted to show his superiority by allowing the crash in the first place (if only to prove how vital he is). This might seem crazy but it's the same principle as the fireman who sets fires and it's very dangerous to have in a company.

Yes, computers crash, but they are easily scanned to see whether the crash was internal or external. Yes, the factory floor slows down when one machine decides to get finicky, yet whose responsibility was it for the machine to keep running properly?

I think we inherently want to blame our machines versus our people because, after all, machines come with a warranty, an owner's manual or a tool kit. Machines can be easily fixed or, barring that, replaced. People are not so easily fixed.

People can be messy situations; they require confrontation, soothing, stroking, conflict management and, ultimately, deliberate and well thought through management action. Yet often we throw good money after bad fixing machines that aren't broken, streamlining systems that weren't problematic and hiring consultants to tell us the system checked out okay rather than simply go straight to the source: the person behind the problem.

When the Roadblock is a Person: *Avoiding “Human Roadblocks”*

A primary value I bring to a company is the ability to identify roadblocks that are slowing or otherwise limiting company success and, quite often, **the roadblock is a person.**

These “human roadblocks” come in a variety of positions with the key salesperson, key technical person or key operations person often the in-house culprits – and key suppliers being outside problems. Let’s examine how each of these problematic people – these human roadblocks – can provide real roadblocks to your success:

- The **problem key salesperson** might have the biggest sales numbers, so management considers him a “sacred cow” and gives him way too much leeway in how he operates within the company or interfaces with other departments. The more leeway this salesperson is given, the more likely his power is to grow and the more difficult he’ll be to steer in later. One problem salesperson can, and in most companies will, do more damage in terms of morale and other difficult-to-quantify factors, than any amount of profit he or she might be delivering. You can see the same in a successful sports team. The 12 people who can play seamlessly together will always beat a team with one or two non-team-player hotshots. So watch for the key salesperson holding you hostage syndrome.
- The **problem key technical person** typically has everyone convinced that he is irreplaceable, that the world will collapse if he is diverted from his mission-critical job and management gives this fellow way too much leeway in his

activities. It is important not to let one person hold the key to all of the company's technology, and the easiest way to diffuse this individual's power is to have him share it with a co-worker, colleague or even a superior.

- Finally, the **problem key operations person**, while sometimes not as overtly problematic, maintains important operations information “in his head,” thus making him also seem irreplaceable and this situation is a danger to the company's future. Whether he's too busy to memorialize key information or processes or something more nefarious like holding back information to keep himself irreplaceable, it's bad for the company, it's a roadblock and you must attend to the situation for maximum success.

Don't Be Held Hostage By Your Key People

If you're still reading this section, odds are that you recognize one or more of these human roadblocks within your company and have been frustrated at some point, if not daily, because the problem sales person is cavalier about the need to attend company meetings, the technical person gets away with indecipherable responses when critical technology isn't working, and the operations person just “doesn't have the time” to share his institutional knowledge with others and surely can't document the operations process.

Regardless of how long this has been going on or who hired these problematic people to begin with or allowed them to become problematic, these barriers are holding you back and must be eradicated. It may seem unpleasant, it may seem problematic, it may even seem unthinkable, but NO employee has the right to

hold you or your company's success hostage any longer. This is one of the most important secrets for business.

Now more than ever, we realize the reasons why such key employees rise to such heights of great power. Business leaders are often hands-on people, leaving the technical stuff, sales and operations to experts in their own right. They expect the best from people and are too-often surprised when these hostage situations hit some critical stage.

Your job is to be the top entrepreneur, the thinker, the planner, the figurehead and the superhero. Meanwhile, technology advances, new products are added every day that need to be sold and operations grows more technical and advanced by the day. How can you keep up and avoid being held hostage?

Well, that's what your experts are for; they should be watching out for you and the company. However, human nature is such that we always take what we are given – and then just a little more. Give a child one cookie, he wants two. Give a child a shopping spree at one store, she wants the whole mall. Give your self-declared irreplaceable tech guy a bonus for getting you online under budget – and on time – he wants an extra zero added to his paycheck.

It can be tempting to give in to such demands because, after all, what company can do without technology, sales or operations? While that may be true, YOU are the only person who is irreplaceable at your company.

You need technology, but not this specific tech guy. You need sales, but not this particular salesperson. You need operations handled effectively and routinely, but this particular operations person doesn't have to be the only person who can do it. To achieve maximum success you must accept this premise that your

company is no exception; you can take my word for this as I've passed through enough companies to be qualified to make this blanket statement.

The Costs of Being Held Hostage by One or More Key Employees

Giving your tech guy higher and higher bonuses may seem like a small price to pay to stay online, plugged in and logged on, but consider the bigger, hidden costs of being held hostage by this single employee.

What if he gets sick? Who can keep you online then? What if he jumps ship? It is pretty well established now that tech people stay in jobs for 18 to 24 months. Who will be able to replace him then? What if he has proprietary information about software you've developed, hardware you've perfected or simply a new product getting ready to launch?

These are not some nightmare scenarios out of the latest Hollywood conspiracy film, but real life questions, issues and dangers I see business owners deal with every day of the week.

And even in the day-to-day, seemingly mundane operations of your business, lesser – although no less important – issues can equally handicap your performance. For instance, let's say your marketing department is ready to post their latest corporate blog entry but Mr. Pompous Tech Guy is away at yet another "convention" and won't be able to "get to it" until he gets back next week because he can't access the server. Although, didn't he have a \$5,000 item on his expense report for a laptop with remote access features?

Well, by next week, the relevant, timely and newsworthy item they spent all this week Blogging about will likely be irrelevant,

so now you have a whole department who has not only wasted several otherwise productive days but must now sit idle to see their work fail to come to fruition, to say nothing of the lost publicity – and prospects – you might have gained from having been first to market with this timely and creative blog.

We have talked so often in this book about the ripple effect these small obstacles have on your success, and nothing casts as wide a ripple as being held hostage by a key employee in a vital department.

Here are just a few of the other hidden costs of being held hostage this way:

- Employee resentment; your other employees think you're a poor leader for letting this happen. To some extent they are right.
- Lost time to market; always difficult to quantify but a life and death item for many companies.
- Slower response times; idle people waiting on one guy is a formula for mediocrity at best.
- Less authority from on high; try to take a strong position on anything when your employees see you getting beaten down by the tech guy.
- Fewer safeguards against abandonment; or maybe no safeguards.
- Less opportunity for other qualified people in these key positions; there are likely a dozen people in the wings with 90 percent of the skills of the tech guy who's intimidating you. Engage them.
- Less diversity in these key positions (the key person doesn't want to work with this or that "type" of employee); it's

always one excuse or another as the hostage-holding tech guy protects what he sees as his domain (no pun intended here).

- Such employees become harder to replace with each passing quarter; the deeper and more confusing the web they build around themselves, the more expensive it is to replace them.

This list could go on and on; the point is not to demonize your key employees, who may or may not bring real value to the organization (but most usually do). The point is to limit the amount of power these employees have, not the profits they bring in.

Sure, it might cost more to force a key employee to share his or her knowledge with a colleague – particularly when that employee is accustomed to autonomy and you have the history of only paying one person to do the job – but the value of safeguards against your future are, again, immeasurable.

Emotionally speaking, to be sure, the emotional costs of being held hostage in your own company are extremely high. Feelings of disbelief, disappointment and even impotence can cause one to avoid the situation even more rather than facing it even sooner. We have seen how well avoidance works, so now it's time to make sure we do something about this sooner rather than later.

1 Attitude and 3 Steps to Success

So, you've now identified the "holding you hostage" problem, but what can you do to stop it? Here is the single most important attitude you absolutely must have or you are limiting your business, and the two steps you absolutely must take to succeed:

Your Worst Case Scenario Attitude

First, you must realize and actually believe in your heart that ANYONE can be replaced if they are negatively affecting the business. This is an internal attitude for management and not in conflict with the absolute need to respect and care for every contributing member of your team.

Sure, there might be a dip in sales if you drop the sales person, but is he perhaps costing your company more in terms of morale as others see the rules don't apply to this fellow? The email system might be down for a few hours as a new technical person takes the helm but when I see this, nine times out of ten your technology will work *better* overall once the problem tech guy is gone.

And what about the problem key operations person? If you would be out of business if he quit or became ill, you're risking too much by hiring him in the first place. This worst case scenario might make you feel anxious or intimidated at first, but it's absolutely mandatory when being held hostage.

Three Steps to Success

Being held hostage is a feeling no business owner wants to experience and, occasionally, the only solution is to terminate the key employee who's been doing the hostage holding. But before we get to that point (and ideally we won't), here are the three steps to resolving this issue, once and for all:

Step 1: Back Up

Before you do anything, have a backup plan in place; this is your first step. If it's the tech guy holding you hostage, bring in an outside consultant after hours to back up your systems, troubleshoot any potential damage this person might cause for you and ensure that your system is safe in case of any worst case scenario. Also make a deal for an interim tech guy who can be in place in a matter of hours if your problem fellow doesn't respond well to criticism and bails.

This may all be for naught, considering how this individual responds to Steps 2 or 3, but you wouldn't think of going on vacation without backing up your computer before you drive off to the airport. Would you? So why would you leave your company at risk instead? There is also no better feeling during a negotiation of any sort or potentially confrontational employee discussion than having a fully negotiated backup standing by. Write the words *Have Backups* on a post it note and place it where you will see it every day; an important secret for business.

Step 2: Confrontation

After you have a backup system and person in place, go directly to your problem key employee and respectfully explain your discomfort. Explain what you've been experiencing, the dissatisfaction of his colleagues or his performance, his attitude or your perception of his attitude.

Don't speak without listening; give him a chance to respond. Perhaps this is simply his personality and he will have to work on his people skills. If so, great! If not, then at least you'll know.

Quite often these key employees are bullies who have been given a little bit of power, used it to their advantage but have no way of gaining it anywhere else; the threat of termination is often enough to put them in their place. If not, then termination is exactly what they deserve. Bullies of any sort in the workplace have to go; and this is an absolute for you to achieve maximum success.

Step 3: Termination

Sometimes, however, the key employee – believing himself irreplaceable – will make an untenable stand and you have to eliminate the problem that very moment; no half-measures where you simmer for weeks while the employee nukes some hard-drives and bad mouths you in the lunch room.

Instead, just give him his severance and send him on his way. Have security at the ready and have them escorted him from the building; you can forward his personal belongings. The risk is too high for a terminated tech guy to have access to the technology. If possible, do this away from his usual area of operations so the temptation to “shut everything down” doesn’t take hold.

I should note here that any plan to dismiss an employee in this manner should always be passed by your HR manager and/or lawyer just to make sure you’re covered in terms of liability. This simple preliminary step will help you avoid getting held hostage twice: first by the key employee and second by a lawsuit!

Free At Last!

Trust me, there is freedom in discipline! It may be hard to let a key

employee go; the transition may cause anxiety and the change may create a few sleepless nights, but comfort yourself with the fact that it had to be done. You simply can not be held hostage in your own company.

You have to remember that you were in the right, after all. Any employee who would hold you hostage, make unrealistic demands, alienate other employees and even supervisors, who would disrespect you and that which your company stands for, no matter how good at his job he may have been, is never going to change his ways and become a model employee.

Losing his position – or his opposition – now frees you to find a model employee to replace him with; and this truly IS an opportunity. Believe me, I have seen each of the above scenarios scores of times and in every case sales go up surprisingly quickly as other salespeople step up their efforts to fill the void. The new technology person is universally better as your company has likely outgrown the former guru and part of his difficult attitude was perhaps his inability to understand how to address expanding needs; and you will sleep better at night knowing that no single operations person can crash your business by quitting or making some unreasonable demand.

Is a key employee holding you hostage? Take care of it immediately. You will profit from the result – now AND later. That's a secret to maximize your business' potential.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

The problem key technical person typically has everyone convinced that he is irreplaceable, that the world will collapse if he is diverted from his mission-critical job and unfortunately management gives this fellow way too much leeway in his activities. Work it out or show him the door; either way, do it today.

NO OPEN CHANNEL TO INNOVATION OR NEW MARKETS

“When your business is going well there is an immense temptation to get a bit lazy, enjoy the fruits of your labor and let the status quo rule. When your business is doing poorly there is an equally strong temptation to do more of what’s not working and do it faster in some vain hope that things will get better. Learn a lesson from business leaders who succeed for ten or even thirty years – When things are bad, do something new, quickly. When things are good, do something new even more quickly. An open eager mind is the hallmark of the successful business owner or manager.”

— Ainslie Waldron

Sometimes barriers are imposed upon you, like bleak economic times, lightning-fast technology that is expensive or too time-consuming to keep up with or even unsatisfactory employees who delay or, in some cases, impede progress altogether. Other times, stagnation is self-inflicted; this is a particularly poisonous kind of roadblock.

I know it can be challenging to face the future with eagerness, respond to market demands with dexterity or, for that matter, change at all. You lead your business to this point by doing what

you do best, in an often replicable way that made transitions smooth and progress easy.

But change is in the air, yesterday, today, tomorrow. Our comfort zone may keep us comfortable, yes, but it's not the best breeding ground for new ideas, competitive systems or stellar employees. Appropriate change is a business secret of all great leaders.

This is not a suggestion to stop doing what has worked so well to do something else. Rather, it is a suggestion to keep doing what you are doing that's working – only do it better! A better way, in better markets, for better customers, with better marketing, etc.

New is not always better, not by a long shot, but isn't it worth a look? Currently, in these trying times, those who don't keep up can – and often do – get left behind. Just ask the folks who used to work for Circuit City, Bennigans, Linens & Things and Steak & Ale or the scores of other companies that have fallen by the wayside as markets have contracted.

Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater; don't stop doing what works to risk it all on a whim, a chance or a risk with no rhyme or reason. But in order to keep up – and get ahead – you owe it to yourself, your company, your vision for the future, to at least have a few people on staff with an eye for the future and an ear to the ground.

Their jobs are to challenge and improve the Status Quo: always a mantra for smart business leaders.

When you or your employees become satisfied with the status quo or R & D is too busy recreating what's always worked in the

past to be looking outward, success gets put on hold – indefinitely. In order to grow, compete and measurably succeed, every company must have proactively open channels to innovation and new markets.

This doesn't mean spending millions to open a new wing for new research, but it can mean corralling some of your youngest, newest, savviest or most trusted employees and charging them with the mission of staying relevant – and ahead.

Change makes us all anxious; discomfort by definition makes us, well, uncomfortable. You built your company on a set of values or ideas, on a product or products, on a service or services that have served you well time and time again; that was then.

Reconsidering your secret formula, upgrading your marketing campaign, your slogan, your company logo or simply testing a new product launch can cost more than just dollars and cents; your very brand value is at stake.

But that brand will be all but worthless if it stands for the past and not the future. Every company is charged with the task of change. The telltale red and silver Coca-Cola cans are recognizable the world over, but that doesn't mean they don't try new, fresh, hip and eye-popping labels designed to look like pigskin during Superbowl fever or to resemble popular ornament designs during the holiday season. They constantly probe new ideas and have entire divisions devoted to the next Coke thing.

McDonald's is famous for its Big Macs and McNuggets, but that doesn't stop them from delivering an annual boat load of McRib sandwiches – for a limited time only – to a slavish and hungry fan base who make this annual McTradition a pilgrimage of sorts. Salads, lattes, lo-cal plates and more are the resulting tests of a proactive McDonald's management.

There is value in the tried and true, in the old and familiar. That's why Coke always goes back to its instantly recognizable labels and McDonalds limits the amount of time they offer the McRib sandwich. But that's the beauty in change; it doesn't erase the hard work and effort you've put into creating a brand image for your company over all these years.

If you make a misstep and the change is for the worse, you can always hit the "reset" button and go back to what worked before. It might be a costly, time-consuming experiment but what of the changes that add value, profit and productivity to your business? Where would you be without them? And you *would* be without them if you hadn't decided to test them in the first place.

The Many Costs of Ignoring New Ideas

What are the costs of closing yourself off to new markets or ideas? Let me count the ways! Here some of the biggest consequences of not having your ear to the ground or your eyes toward the future:

- Missed opportunities; you'll never know what might have worked and launched your company into entire new profit arenas.
- Losing ground to the competition; your best competitors are always open to new things; some won't work but some will – you'll see them as they pass you by.
- Not being aware of the competition; hiding your head and hoping the competition isn't on the ball won't get you to your maximum business success – it will only assure ultimate failure.

- Having irrelevant marketing materials; expensive unchanging corporate brochures are usually a sign of overly staid management. Their competitors will have cool digital representations of the value the company delivers.
- Missing certain audience segments entirely; closing your eyes to an economically enabled demographic is just foolish.
- Employees clamoring for change; they have a stake in the company too – acknowledge it or it will cost you more than profits.
- Employees moving on to bigger and better things is the cost of ignoring their clamor for change; everyone wants to have at least something new going on.
- Low employee morale is a cost that can't be measured with specificity; at least until your doors close for the last time.
- Lost market share to the competition; market leaders never stay that way when innovation is in the air at competing companies and not at their own.

Need I go on?

The fact is, change is inevitable; the only variables are how often you change, how committed you are to positive change and how effective that change is for your company. Having a positive and proactive attitude about change is the leading indicator that change will be an asset versus a liability.

Change Leads to Progress; Progress Leads to Profits

Every day I speak to business leaders who overlook prime markets

or opportunities simply because they are untested, unproven or, in many cases, simply unfamiliar ground.

Forget desperate times; even *good* times require desperate measures these days to stay on top, but when your company makes opening new territories a priority rather than something to be avoided, you can scout such opportunities more quickly – and easily – than one might imagine.

Let's say you're a cereal manufacturer with slumping sales. What to do? Lower the price? Can't do that; the raw materials for processing are becoming more expensive, not less, and you're already competitively priced. Change the box? No, too expensive and time-consuming.

So, what *can* you do to make sure your teams are exploring every potential opportunity that exists to expand? Well, you can invest a few prime people from critical departments – marketing, creative and manufacturing – to spend one afternoon a week meeting solely to explore new markets, ideas and opportunities to expand your brand.

You should certainly enlist these folks to scout out the competition, go on “field trips” to neighboring stores to see what everyone else is up to, to do “taste tests” and “market research” to understand other ways in which you can utilize your basic cereal in new and exciting venues.

You can explore possibilities for co-marketing with other businesses, sponsoring charities or events, cereal eating contests or dozens of other ideas generated by this simple but critical task force.

This can be an informal gathering, a simple opportunity in the break or conference room to spread out, share a midday snack

and cup of coffee and let the ideas flow to see what profitable new territory might become visible. The format and structure of the team will of course vary depending on the size of your company but the theme is always the same.

Now, this is what I mean by keeping “open channels to innovation or new markets.” This team event, this open-thought exercise is exactly the kind of low-cost, high-impact idea that will make Progress not just an isolated event at your company, but a habit. But without the resources devoted to brainstorming brilliant, “why didn’t I think of that sooner?” ideas, you might never explore potentially grand opportunities for your own company.

And that would be a major roadblock to success indeed; proactive brainstorming for new markets is an important secret for business.

The 4 Benefits of Your Brainstorming Department

Here are four simple ways to start, continue and profit from your own Brainstorming Department that will eliminate roadblocks to innovation in this area of your company and open doors to expansion:

- 1. Make brainstorming a habit, not an event:** Employees need to know you are making a firm commitment to progress, not just a one-time, “flavor of the month” approach to something new or unique that will quickly lose out to other company exigencies. Your employees know when you’re just going through a phase or blowing corporate smoke; you simply must commit the time, energy and resources to

this idea to make it work and, what's more, to convince this unique committee that what it's doing has real import and meaning for the company at large. Employee buy-in is huge, not just as a recent buzzword but as an actual emotion that causes your people to have better results, more often.

2. **Have clear goals – and rewards:** Participants must know what they are charged with – in this case identifying and opening up new markets or opportunities for revenue – and their rewards: a bonus for every implemented idea, be it money, vacation time, stock options or a better parking space or a two-year lease on a new Porsche for an idea that proves transformational to your company. The beauty of this reward system is that it is very low-impact for you. Basically, these are existing employees who, aside from an occasional lunch stipend or overtime hour or two, are getting their basic salary, costing you little to implement. The rewards are many, however, for a single revolutionary idea at the behest of this committee could increase profits from .05% to 25% -- all for the cost of a few days off, a parking space or a few grand on a car lease! And recruiting new employees and keeping every one focused on creativity gets really easy as word spreads of a sports car lease, vacation for the family or other low-cost high-return bonuses.
3. **Define the strategy clearly:** This is not a human suggestion box approach to garnering new ideas, nor is it a cheap end run of your Research and Development division (a member of which should always be on the Brainstorming Committee). When participants feel they are a part of an important and valued team, an official team with a name

and a task and a regular place to meet, they will be more inclined to fully and enthusiastically participate in ways that are meaningful to them and the company's bottom line profits.

4. **Rotate members:** Make this a monthly or quarterly membership, where department members are rotated in and out of the Brainstorming Department every 30 to 90 days to keep the ideas fresh and original. The best part is, once engaged, recognized and financially or otherwise incented, members will be begging to get back into that brain room and share new ideas! You can also bestow "honorary lifetime memberships" to former successful participants and keep these stars in the loop through an internal newsletter system, email list or informal monthly gathering of all past and present members.

Change for the Best

Why is there resistance to change a roadblock? Why is closing yourself off to innovation or new markets a barrier to success? In simple point of fact, right now you are not reaching everyone you could be; no company is, so it's time to see what you and your competitors are missing.

Every company has room to improve market share, from the Mac users who don't avail themselves of Dell products to the Burger King fanatics who have never tasted a McRib sandwich! No one has a true monopoly on any one market, and this is the beauty of capitalism; there is always room for growth, for market dominance, to capture your share of the pie.

The biggest company can lose out to the smallest competitor on any given day so long as that new upstart brings something fresh, rewarding and valuable to the table. Whether you're David or Goliath really doesn't matter; every day is a new opportunity to kill or be killed, live or die, succeed or fail.

When you are open to new ideas, opportunity is an attitude everyone in your organization shares. But when you close yourself off to new ideas, don't reward employees for innovation, stubbornly resist new technology or systems that could increase productivity and hence enhance profits, you are not only sabotaging yourself but inhibiting the enthusiasm and motivation your employees naturally bring to the job.

Studies have shown that monetary compensation alone is not going to keep employees happy, vital, and fulfilled or, for that matter, keep employees at all. Work is work; we all know that. But modern employees want more than just a paycheck and benefits. They want to be actively engaged, they want to be respected, they want to be challenged and, what's more, they want to feel like their opinions count; they must be an individual who matters and is making a positive recognized contribution – to the department, to the company, to the customers, to the world.

Your employees want to try new things, they want you to succeed, and they want to be a part of the success of your company. They will be incredibly resourceful, creative, dynamic, motivated and productive if given the chance to share in your success in a deep and meaningful way. Innovation, creativity, brainstorming and being open to new ideas is the secret path to helping them help you!

THE SECRET SUMMARY

To stay on top or to get there fast, business leaders must be constantly and proactively open to new markets, new technologies and new ideas. What's more, they must create and nurture an environment where employees are part of a community that identifies opportunities to capture new markets, enhance profits, and does everything possible to make the company successful. Evolved leaders and engaged employees will deliver amazing results.

NO TIME OR COMMITMENT TO LEARN

“You’re on top of your game; 10 years industry experience, new contracts, new contacts, a pipeline filled with new customers, and you can estimate your competitors’ game plans with uncanny accuracy. You’ve paid your dues and finally you can take it a little easy: golf twice a week rather than work on an industry study, take the kids on a luxury trip instead of the national industry trade show – STOP. Yes, you’ve earned some golf and a vacation but if you’re not learning and arranging educational opportunities for your employees, you’ll be falling behind in six months and out of date in a year. A commitment to learning for everyone from the executive suite to the factory floor is the sign of very successful companies and an important secret for business.”

— Ainslie Waldron

Success is often a question of your values; not your high-order values, per se, your religion, your philosophy on life, the universe and everything. Instead, day-to-day success comes down to what you value on a day-to-day basis.

In other words, who do you tend to hire when it comes down to two virtually identical employees? The one with the impressive academic pedigree or the one with the hard won street smarts?

What do you put your money and muscle behind? Marketing and PR or Research and Development? Do you promote from within or without? When was the last time you handed out a gift card as a holiday bonus or held an employee picnic?

These little things matter; to you, to the company, to your employees, to your supervisors and eventually, through them, to your customers. If you hire only academics, you send a certain message to those without Ivy League pedigrees; if you hire only street smart achievers, you send an equal message to the academics.

One message is neither better nor worse than the other, but a message it is. So it is with your attitude toward learning, toward growth, toward achievement, toward recognition and toward the future.

The underlying philosophy for a company is regularly driven by its leader; that being you. Your philosophies, your beliefs, your daily routines, whether you value innovation or not, eventually flow out through every department, division, employee, service and product.

So your attitude about learning on the job, about rewarding those who go back to school, put in purchase orders for textbooks, manuals, DVDs and other training materials says as much about your company as it does about your attitude toward success. It is no coincidence that companies with the highest levels of investment in employee education, direct and indirect, are the most successful, most respected and longest lasting firms.

Learning: *Soft Skill - or Hard?*

Often companies see learning, workshops, seminars, class work and a commitment to growth as so many soft skill costs that “aren’t

really worth the time or investment”, or at least they can’t find any way to quantify the benefit to help the financials this quarter or even this year.

For my money, nothing could be more of a roadblock to your success than a lack of educational support. Frankly, if you’re not learning these days, you’re going backwards and will be out of business as your people obsolesce. Employees who value knowledge, skill, training and growth do not just impact today’s profit and productivity but instead are the very lifeblood of your success. You can’t do it alone; we’ve all learned that.

You have to rely on talented people with a willingness to learn, stretch and grow to keep the company active, profitable, relevant and vital. Whether you have a Ph.D. from Harvard or the School of Hard Knocks, it is your appreciation of learning that counts the most.

Knowledge, skill and innovation are no less vital to your bottom-line profits than are the raw materials from which your product is created, the manpower that assembles your widgets or the salespeople who contribute to your annual budget.

Every time an employee takes a class, reads an article that sparks an idea, discovers a new way to do something cheaper, easier, faster or better, they are increasing productivity and amassing profit. Just because you can’t see the shape, size or dimensions of the knowledge they have just gained doesn’t mean you can’t see the results.

Learning is Valuable

Learning is key to progress and profits, regardless of the company or department. As we saw in the section on brainstorming groups,

a simple, half-hour, once a week, on-the-clock commitment to opening up new revenue opportunities can result in a broad jump for one average manufacturer from, for instance, a simple cereal manufacturer to the broader food and beverage arena; one's mind reels at the opportunities such a leap could have for the future. New products, new categories and even new industries. You see this all the time as staid companies, with new evolved management, leap into areas you never would have considered and succeed geometrically with new profits.

Yet the idea might never have borne fruit if not for brainstorming new ideas; if not for the time, energy and commitment made by your company to go beyond competing and staying ahead of the competition.

On that front, I have news for you: if you don't think learning has real value, **your competition surely does**. They value learning, reward knowledge and celebrate innovation. That's what keeps them competitive, what keeps them constantly nipping at your heels or holding you back and threatening to overtake you at every turn.

And that's precisely why having no time or commitment to learn is such a hazardous roadblock to your success; you are limiting your company by shackling your people to mediocrity and limiting their opportunity to show the best in themselves – and your company.

7 Priceless Results of a Firm Commitment to Learn

If you're worried that training, workshops, panels, keynotes, breakout sessions and brainstorming aren't worth the time, money

or effort, allow me to identify for you 7 *Priceless Results of a Firm Commitment to Learn*:

- **Priceless Result # 1 – Ownership:** Employees don't just want a job; they want a career or at least to be on a winning team. They want to feel a part of something bigger than themselves, and when you create learning opportunities for them they view their jobs with a greater sense of ownership and as part of that team. This employee ownership makes self-starters out of everyone. That means they, completely of their own volition, take pride in what they are doing and, in so doing, feel compelled to challenge themselves daily. Employees as owners sounds like yet another soft skill but as we've already seen, no business owner is an island unto themselves; having employees who take ownership of the success of the company makes your job that much easier. Your success is also that much more likely.
- **Priceless Result # 2 – Ingenuity:** Ingenuity is a self-fulfilling prophecy. In other words, employees who are rewarded for ingenuity definitely become more ingenious. Their curiosity becomes an addiction; one successful idea turns into two, then three and suddenly they can't keep it to themselves. All of a sudden the whole department is on fire, alive with new ideas and enthusiasm. If you've been in a room on one of those days you know the feeling in the air; everyone present knows that success is going to happen and it's just a matter of how big that success can be. I've seen and felt it happen time and time again with wondrous results for companies big and small. But employees who are punished

for thinking outside the box or told “we don’t do things that way here” quickly learn that the status quo is all that is rewarded; hence, it’s all they’ll ever give. Isn’t this the recipe for guaranteed business mediocrity? This roadblock is particularly limiting to your success because it saps the very momentum you seek to gain by reading a book like this. In the classroom, teachers who demand very little from their students get very little; teachers who demand more get what they demand. It’s the same on the job, employers who restrain and stymie their employees get employees who literally act like they’ve been restrained and blocked. When you don’t care about learning, they quickly “learn” that their position is not a career, as they’d hoped, but just another job, as they’d feared. Don’t give them that opportunity to give up on you by giving up on them. Create that most-successful-day-ever atmosphere daily.

- **Priceless Result # 3** – *Enthusiasm*: Employees, who are valued sufficiently to invest in, know they are being groomed for something “better.” Everyone, from the mailroom to the corner office, wants to feel like there is something next, something after, something better, something higher. When this environment exists, they buy into their jobs more, perform them better and do so enthusiastically. Your investment in them pays off in many tangible and intangible ways. The costs of downplaying learning and knowledge are just as obvious. On the other hand, when they know the ceiling above their head is as far as they will go, they may show up to collect their paycheck, but their energy and enthusiasm is quickly replaced by rote and

automation together with a constant search for something better - elsewhere. The cost of this, apparent to one and all, is decreased productivity – which means decreased profits at best and a complete roadblock to your business success as a worse and most likely result.

- **Priceless Result # 4 – *Trust*:** When employees trust you and your commitment to their futures with the company, they are much more likely to perform better, faster, longer and stronger. Giving them incentives through learning opportunities, promotions, seminars and additional training builds this sense of trust in a big way. Trust is hard to get and difficult to measure, but its value is just as hard to dispute. Trust is that hidden difference, that special quality that makes people want to work for you, want to show up early, want to do more, longer and better – for you and for the success of the company you lead. When you ask a particular team to meet an impossible deadline, trust is often just about the only thing that makes it possible. How else could you explain the extra work, talent and effort they give to your request? No day player or temp can give you that; only employees who feel trusted can accomplish such feats. Help them build their skills and let them help build the company. It's a secret for business and a key element to achieving your maximum success.
- **Priceless Result # 5 – *Commitment*:** Workers will commit to you when you commit to them. The worst thing you can do is throw learning at people without giving them a buy-in. Don't just say, "There is a class on Word Processing in the cafeteria this Thursday at 3." Say instead, "As part

of our ongoing Promotion Package this year, Week 3 is focused on Word Processing. Next week, people skills!” Have a beginning, middle and end; use numbers and dates, deadlines and payoffs. People want to know that what they are doing counts towards something and to see how the effect is measured. Labeling something “week 3” implies there was a week 2 and a week 1; now they want to play catch-up. It also implies there will be a week 3 and a week 4; now they want to buy in. Many of your employees won’t have taken classes for years and years; even those fresh out of college can miss the routine and prospect of learning something new. Showing you’re committed to your employees invites their commitment to you. The results in a company of any size, even a four man firm, are priceless.

- **Priceless Result # 6 – Longevity and Reduced Turnover.** Employees need to feel there is a destination to their journey or better yet a series of increasingly valuable destinations. Even if it is only to begin another journey in another department, division or office, giving employees clear goals when it comes to education and training likewise gives them a clear timeline for the payoff to come. Week 1, Week 2. Module 3, Module 4. These are clear and set boundaries that people can believe in, measure and tick off; like collectibles they will want more and more! If you can define their opportunity path clearly – and mark it just as clearly – your employee turnover rate will plummet. Very few companies do this effectively; you can do it with a priceless result. The beauty of this process is that there is very little risk. The cost of such classes, workshops, books and materials is truly

negligible when compared to the clearly valuable asset of employee buy-in, loyalty and commitment. In 90 days it can change the character of your company; in 180 days it can change the firm's destiny. It's a secret for business that few firms get right but those that do...Wow.

- **Priceless Result # 7 – Productivity:** Every employee needs a little guidance from time to time; deadlines and deliverables can only do so much. Meanwhile, classes, training, programs and pods give employees guardrails to direct their productivity. When everyone is excited about the nutrition demonstration in the cafeteria or this month's contest winner for "Most Innovative Marketing Slogan," they unconsciously begin to bond and form as a team; this increases productivity as everyone is working for the common good and having a blast while doing it. And in these trying times, anything you can do to show employees that you still care, that you're still here, that their jobs are secure can create invaluable gains in return. The priceless result can be capturing the leadership role in your industry.

Knowledge: *The Great Equalizer*

If you have ever closely observed a team working together for even a small amount of time, you will notice quickly the natural leaders, the practiced skill masters, the statisticians, the bossy and the bossed. People have a proven tendency to go where they feel most comfortable and, if their skill set is lacking, if they feel insecure, about their academic record or resume, they tend to settle toward the back of the pack.

Knowledge is the great equalizer. Not grades, not levels, not degrees or pay grades, but shared knowledge among a team, a division, a department or organization. Let's say there's a new technology for printing brochures that would dramatically increase productivity and reduce man hours in your Marketing and PR department.

Don't just give it to the department head and leave it at that; only shared knowledge results in shared power. Instead, create a workshop where the department head, the supervisors and the employees learn it together. Bring in an outside expert; it doesn't have to be a "trainer". A well known player in the industry can be a fun and very instructive break in a sometimes tedious work environment. Delivering this knowledge to an entire team ensures that a.) Not just one person holds the magic, b.) Everyone shares equally in the knowledge, c.) The staff can carry on even when the department head is out sick or even if she is discharged and d.) That they all benefit from the same enhanced skill set.

This way followers can become leaders, wallflowers can become frontrunners and a team truly becomes a team. This may not seem like much at first, but imagine if you did this for every division, in every department, every time there was a new upgrade, piece of software or hardware installed.

You have to buy the technology anyway, and the company typically offers such workshops and training as part of the price of admission. Why waste it by only training one person on the team when the entire team can get the same benefit for the exact same cost?

Now you're learning! The only cautionary note for managers within this priceless result area is to watch out for the employees who do nothing but training and accomplish little in their jobs.

Determining the right amount of training is an art rather than a science; just as selecting the type of training that is needed. You minimize this situation by training as groups but it does bear watching out for the rogue learning-addict. This person would typically be better suited to working in an academic environment where learning for the sake of learning is the goal rather than learning for the sake of business application which is what is important to you. But, the ultimate priceless result is a knowledgeable and engaged work team, or a company full of these teams, applying new knowledge for the benefit of your customers and the company's success. Like many of the secrets for business; it seems obvious, but as with the others, this effort is so rarely done well that when it is done properly your teams can catapult your company to the top of the field.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Your employees' knowledge, skill and innovative abilities are all part of the value of your company. Feed and enhance these skills across the board exactly as you would invest in any other business asset; done correctly the results can be priceless and will expand the "maximum" in your maximum business success. It's a secret for business.



SYMPTOMS - SPOT SYMPTOMS TO DIAGNOSE HIDDEN BUSINESS ILLNESSES

If there are 10 common blockages to business success, then why did I feel the need to separate them into two parts? Some of the blockages are clear and evident problems you can spot quickly and solve just as quickly; others are slower, softer “symptoms” of problems that could mushroom if not stopped in time. As going through the process of removing blockages is absolutely necessary to achieve maximum business success, I want you to have the easiest possible formula for achieving that success.

Part 1 was necessary first because it is vitally important to identify the problem before addressing the symptom; in **Part 2** we will address the symptoms so you can identify exactly what you’re dealing with and how to best resolve the problem. As you proceed remember that one secret to business is simply identifying and resolving problems; and business problems which we call roadblocks or barriers, fall into these categories

Symptoms versus Blockages

What is a symptom and what is a blockage? A blockage is something specific you can point to – right now, today – that needs fixing, i.e. a mouthy receptionist, a leaking water cooler, repeated sub par production, a tech guy holding you hostage, low employee morale due to lack of new ideas or innovation. Blockages are very visible problems, although sometimes not to the leaders as we have discussed, which prevent your company from achieving its best potential.

In other words, if you've got the wrong person in a mission-critical position; look out – that's a blockage you can point to, spot and fix immediately, or at least quickly.

However, what led to putting the right person in the wrong position – or simply hiring the wrong person in the first place – is a *symptom* of something bigger and more endemic that could cause even more problems down the line.

If you don't get rid of that symptom when resolving that problem, the specific blockage might have gone away, temporarily, but there is no in-place process for making sure a similar problem won't arise. This section of *The Ultimate Secret for Business* is about addressing those “big picture” issues like self-sabotage, procrastination and even fire fighting versus fire prevention to avoid having to deal with smaller but multiple issues and blockages later on.

Quite simply, the first five challenges are more situational; blockages that require action and the later five problems are resolved by leader-action to improve the situation. The whole idea is that business leaders too often attend to the symptom because it

fixes a difficult situation today but they fail to take the second step and that is to identify and resolve the underlying problem.

A Little Goes a Long Way

Sometimes an important concept can best be illustrated by a simple life story; like the friend of mine who recently bought a bike. It was a great bike, very upmarket with all the bells and whistles, and with the price of the bike came a free air pump so he could handle whatever came up with the tires. Well, that was the beginning of the end.

My friend became obsessed with the bike's already smooth ride by trying to make it even smoother. Naturally, this meant inflating the tires to about as high as they could go. "Did you read the owner's manual?" I asked "Over inflating your tires can be as harmful as letting them go under inflated."

This new bike "pro" scoffed, pumped the tires some more and headed off down the road. Well, a few hours later he came back, bedraggled and bemoaning the fact that his back tire had literally exploded and of course it happened the maximum possible distance from his home!

He searched everywhere but within himself for a reason, blamed the bike manufacturer who claimed the tires were virtually flat-proof, then went straight back to the store and demanded the refund. After a little haggling, he came back with yet another bike and, sure enough, the first thing he did was inflate – I should say, over inflate – the tires.

He zoomed off down the block and made it okay. But a few rides later, pop goes the back tire. Again, he went straight to the bike shop,

secure in the fact that he was in the right and that some bicycle buy-back conspiracy was in full effect. This time the bike shop owner was less inclined to give a full refund so my friend came back with a different model bike – and a slightly lighter wallet.

Fortunately I had hidden his bike pump! When he asked for it I told him, “Take five bike rides and if you don’t pop a tire, I’ll give it back.” Well, five rides later he’d realized the error of his ways and wasn’t so eager to over inflate his tires again. Instead, he sat down and read the owner’s manual and realized not only that there was a gauge on the tire pump but that his particular tires weren’t supposed to be inflated over a certain measure of pressure; that this was the secret to the virtually flat proof tires.

When I gave him back his pump he always made sure to stay well under the recommended measure and, that was that. Hundreds of bike rides later his tires are as good as new; lesson learned. I hesitate to mention, but it makes for a better story, that this bike owner holds a very powerful position in our state’s business community.

So, what could this story possibly have to do with Part 2 of a book called *The Ultimate Secret for Business*?

Simply put, my friend was experiencing both blockages AND symptoms that were holding back his, in this case, bike riding success. The blockages were the flat tires; simple things he could see and, with a quick trip back to the bike store or, later, a few bills and change, he could easily address.

Like a company with a mouthy receptionist, he could hear his tires pop.

Like a high-priced tech guy playing World of Warcraft during a system wide computer crash, he could see the tire flat on the ground.

Like the wrong person in the right job, he could feel the long walk home, dragging his bike along behind him.

Now, these obvious blockages were caused by something more serious; this something was the symptom that resulted in the blockages. In his case, his symptom – or symptoms – were a.) Not reading the owner’s manual, b.) Rushing into things without proper preparation, c.) Over inflating his tires and d.) Not looking beyond the blockage to see what caused it in the first place.

It’s not so much that blockages are less of an impediment to your success than symptoms, they aren’t; it IS that if you don’t address the underlying symptoms/problems that caused the blockages in the first place – bad hiring practices that put the wrong person in the right job, letting the tech guy intimidate or hold you hostage, etc. – the blockages will keep popping up and producing barriers to your success.

Hence, now we’ll turn our attention toward the remaining five symptoms to make sure that we can eradicate them and reduce blockages, barriers and certain roadblocks in the future. If you want to achieve maximum success for your business and to do it quickly; removing these roadblocks will open the door to unprecedented business success.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Both blockages and their underlying causes must be addressed to remove roadblocks to your success AND eliminate their underlying cause to make sure the problem doesn’t surface again. This secret for business assures your short term freedom to succeed and assures a blockage free path for the future.

SELF SABOTAGE

“Over the last two decades I’ve advised management at almost every kind of business from hair salons to auto parts manufacturers and there is an all too common problem: leaders who actively limit their own success” — Ainslie Waldron

Did you know that some business leaders are actually afraid of their own company’s success? I guess, in a way, it shouldn’t be so surprising. After all, success brings change and, even for those operating the most successful companies on the planet, change can be intimidating.

We’ve already discussed the emotional fear and anxiety that comes from change or in the following example, ill conceived change, but it’s important to note that in a very real way poorly executed change can threaten our bottom line profits. Changing something as simple but fundamental as a bottle design, for instance, can cost hundreds of thousands of dollars from this quarter’s budget but, if not properly-researched, can cost you millions in lost revenue for many quarters to come.

For instance, what if the new bottle shape doesn’t fit in the latest convenience store coolers or shelves or makes for bottles that don’t stack well in cases? The new fashion bottle might look as cool as all get-out, but if the store clerks have to stock it on some

bottom shelf where no one will see it, where it's not at eye level, where it can't compete with the other more traditional-shaped bottles, what is the point? You look good but you are sabotaging your own success.

Hopefully one would consider these issues before making the change, but change happens so quickly now, even being aware of cutting-edge research can make failures out of potential successes.

More likely you knew of the new shelf design back when the new bottle shape was first conceived, and could have accounted for it, but by the time endless committees and departments had voted on it, the point became moot and on went the roll-out – to disastrous results. Everyone thought everyone else was looking out for the fundamental issue of making certain the bottle could be displayed where bottles of this product are sold; a tragic error and one I see way too often.

My point here is that when change is done solely for the sake of change it can blind us to the fundamental, nuts and bolts of success. Changing the bottle design? Great idea! Overlooking the new specs on 99% of modern convenience store shelves? A costly and inexcusable oversight produced, most likely, out of poor preparation for change, time lag from concept to market and a host of other ill-conceived issues that all trickled down from one basic thing: failure to prepare for change.

Such oversights happen all the time; more than we'd like to think. What's worse is that, in the above scenario, they are not unforeseen events, uncontrollable forces of nature or even accidents.

They are merely a “symptom” of a company sabotaging itself by failing to assure that changes have positive results. They see

change as something to be embraced and positive change should be welcomed and encouraged; however you can see the results of ill conceived change. Bottle problems one time; sloppy change process leadership. If there's a similarly disastrous bottle problem the second time – that is a rock solid roadblock to your company's success and a symptom of an underlying failure which much be addressed.

More Money, More Problems

Success may bring more profits, but it can also bring more challenges in the process. Profits mean more production, more production means more units or services sold, more units mean more glitches, more glitches mean... more challenges unless you plan ahead. Looking at success from this perspective is an important secret for business.

This is because one of the most disturbing things about a company's diminishing success can be watching it “flinch” when opportunity arises, when a big sale is imminent, when creative comes up with something really catchy or when R & D is onto something big. So what would you think if I told you that one of your biggest barriers to success could, in fact, be yourself? Or, specifically, your self-sabotage?

Small companies are forever sabotaging their own success and for the smaller company these actions can be fatal the very first time; they simply don't have the recovery time or depth of capital supporting larger firms. These firms suffer from a variety of ailments all of which can be classified as self-sabotage; these roadblocks can include:

- Failing to develop and follow a unified vision for the company
- Always hiring from within without even considering hiring from the outside
- Not having an Effective mission statement for the company
- Not recruiting strongly enough or retaining long enough
- Shortsighted decisions in budgeting for growth
- Rewarding C-suite employees or board members for bad performance
- Failing to learn from mistakes and take action to prevent them in the future
- Failing to thoroughly plan for the future
- Fear-based decision making

Lack of Vision = Lack of Success

In addition to committing self-sabotage, many company leaders – no matter the size of the business – also undermine and limit themselves by their own vision for their company. Let's say you're a company offering marketing services to firms in several business sectors. You're good at it, and had some terrific early successes, but now what comes next? Do you just keep doing what you've been doing, day in and day out? Is this level of success all there is? Do you have a deep down feeling there is something more that you could be doing?

Well, many business leaders have this feeling and it should cause you to take a look at your vision. Too few take this simple but critical secret for business step. Start by simply asking yourself what is it that makes your offerings unique from the rest of the

marketing pros out there? Why did you start this company in the first place? It wasn't so you could stall in mediocrity. What was that unique thing that gave you those early successes?

If you look closely enough, perhaps your particular initial vision was based on your status as a youthful company started by young people who know how to market effectively to the youth demographic on behalf of other young companies or, for that matter, companies who want to appeal to the young. Now THAT was, and can be again, one unifying vision, but ONLY if you follow it.

If you dilute your brand or stray off course to begin marketing anything to anyone, serving the youth market, trying to outguess the middle agers, while handling some marketing to elders, without that original competitive and youthful spark that drove your company's initial success, you are **sabotaging yourself** by not sticking with your original company vision: looking forward and planning based upon your market differentiator.

In this case, you created a road block to your own success. This type of road block isn't so much about straying off course, although that is a part of the problem; it's more a lack of looking to the future with a vision of your next greatest level of success. When you're able to see that future, the path becomes defined and even obvious. Get this lack-of-vision roadblock off of your path to success and the results can be astounding: it's a secret for business.

Look, Listen, Monitor, Ask & Act Your Way to Success

Fear, as discussed earlier, is another type of self-sabotaging roadblocks. Fear of failure, fear of risk, fear of embarrassment, fear

of losing it all, fear of making a change, fear of change itself. This sort of fear isn't the hide in the corner sweating with anxiety sort of fear; it's more a subconscious hesitancy to do those things you know just might work but you know you must take a public stand to make them happen. Many company directors that I know are happy to take fees of \$100,000 a year when, in fact, with a small amount of tweaking, they could be taking home fees of more than three times that amount quite easily. The real pros; the absolutely fearless, the ranks of which I hope you will join as a result of reading this book, convert the very same skillset into a seven figure income. I meet these folks all the time and all of them are where they are today because they got past the early fears which so many allow to keep themselves and their companies from maximum business success.

Could your profit margins be much greater than they are at present by just doing a little tweaking? We haven't met yet but I can assure you that your profit margins can in fact be improved. However, you know: if you determine that your dream in life is a particular home in a particular town with a particular car, well, that's what you'll have; no more, no less.

And if your dream for your life is to do a certain amount of business and reach a particular level of professional achievement and receive the comforts that go with that level, that's the level that you will eventually reach. So too with companies; quite often, when companies reach that expected level of success, comfort or whatever you want to call it, their leaders sabotage the firm by thinking that their company is "only" worth this or "only" worth that and it's not able to go much further. These leaders are the ones who brag about consistent 10% annual growth over the years. That number might be a great conservative return on your

retirement fund but if that's your goal for the company, get out of the president's chair and put in someone with vision. If you are investing the time to read this book I am pretty sure you're not a ten percent person.

The Ultimate Secret for Business is for business leaders looking for smart geometric success. The maximum level of achievement for your company can be captured in six months or less; that's what you should get from this book. That's what is possible and that is what your vision for your company should encompass.

If you see something of yourself as a business leader in this discussion and see that self-sabotage could be one of your company's biggest roadblocks or obstacles to success, don't worry. You have taken the first step towards removing this roadblock by conceding it might exist in your firm. So, with your now-open mind consider these five simple steps to eliminating self sabotage and jumping on to the big vision success path instead:

- 1. Look:** As we've seen throughout this book, the first step to removing any barrier is awareness; self-sabotage is no different. Look at yourself – in your position as an employee, a manager, a leader or a company – objectively. Drop the emotional baggage, the insecurities, the ego and the doubt. Picture the fearless powerful leader and compare it with a frank analysis starting with looking at how others see you; define your present position in the marketplace and quantify how you are perceived by others. If you come away from this exploration feeling that you're not quite living up to your potential that is the likely outcome for almost everyone. The next step: examine the reasons behind this failure to

achieve maximum success. What is holding you back? If your employees are all capable, your product is sound, the market is there and your numbers are fine, the only thing holding you back from unbelievable and unlimited success might be yourself. This can be a breakthrough exercise and can uncover this roadblock.

- 2. Listen:** Every company has an underlying current and your success as a business leader as well as the potential of the firm is in part based on your ability to connect with this current. Some call it a vibe; others say it's a mood or a tone that visitors can hear in every word of your company literature, in your marketing slogans, in your ad copy and even in the choice of music you play when customers are on hold. It's a non-quantifiable element of your brand. Some examples are Richard Branson and his Virgin line of products. The company tone is decidedly upbeat, whether you're looking at a cell phone ad, browsing in one of his fun, funky mega-stores, flying on one of his planes or visiting the corporate offices. Bill Gates and his foundation at Microsoft corporate offices have a world citizen's vibe, a world leader's current and, for that reason their businesses are supremely confident in their niche. What does your company's vibe, mood or tone say about it and what sort of energy to you project as its leader? If the message you send out to the world is uncertain or hesitant, that could be a distinct reflection of how your company views itself. Don't work day and night to get this far and then let fear, doubt or hesitancy poison the very life current of the organization and sabotage the company by spreading this vibe to your employees,

investors and customers. Tap in to the current and pilot the company to amazing success by using, defining, and controlling this subtle power.

3. **Monitor:** Constantly be aware of how you, as a business leader, manage your company's day-to-day dealings. What is your attitude and what message do you convey? I'm not suggesting you change dramatically or try to be someone – or something - inauthentic, but awareness can often lead to understanding of opportunities you are missing and challenges you might even be creating; thus in order to stop sabotaging yourself you will need to first know whether and why you sabotage yourself in the first place. By monitoring your daily attitude, the message you give to employees and especially customers, you can not only detect self-sabotage but, with awareness and a bit of work, you can head it off altogether. My clients often find this exercise extremely freeing, almost liberating, because self-sabotage is the silent killer of business success. They truly often don't realize how much they've been holding themselves, and their company, back. Freeing themselves from this self-doubting attitude really opens the path of success! That is what *The Ultimate Secret for Business* will create in your life and company – an open path to the best possible results for your firm.
4. **Ask:** Ask yourself why you might be sabotaging your company's success or, if you're not the source of the sabotage, who is. Is there some deep seated psychological reason for pulling back on the reins or is it something more on the surface? Sometimes it's not even a "who" but a "what," as in a poor or ill-timed new launch of a product that is just not

working right or an outdated message or in the alternative that is not quite ready. Sabotage comes in many forms, but you'll never identify any of them if you don't consistently ask yourself what's wrong and why. If every business executive spent 10 minutes a day asking herself these two questions and remaining open to their own answers, the world economy could shift almost overnight. This is the power of Asking and it's a definite secret for business.

5. **Act:** This step is found in almost every one of my secrets for business; it's all well and good to spot a problem, make a note and forget about it. But, if you want to achieve the maximum success promised in this book, you must take action. In this case, whenever or wherever you spot self sabotage in your company, act quickly to stem the tide of that sabotage's damage. If it's in your yawnworthy marketing materials, if you're sending an ambiguous message that doesn't really convey your mission or values, discover and then deliver the **right message**. If a key employee is the saboteur, reprimand, demote, replace or remove him or her altogether; right now. If you're not willing to take this action – just stay home. And if you are self-sabotaging, do what it takes to your company's special advantages so that you can remove this obstacle to success yourself. Remember, success often comes in stages and, when we reach one stage of success, achievement or even comfort, occasionally we need a little nudge, if not something more graphic, to get us out of that rut or off that plateau so we can achieve the next level of success. In your case, we want it to be big visible success and as quickly as possible.

Saying “Yes” Instead of “No”:

Three Cases for Positivity

One of the biggest forms of self-sabotage is shutting oneself off to new things. And now more than ever, the biggest temptation for business leaders in an economic downturn is to say “No” to any new request for capital, every less-than-certain new initiative or plan to enter new markets.

To my way of thinking based on many years of anecdotal experience this is not so much a coping mechanism or money-saving measure as it is a recipe for slow, painful business death. The more evolved business leaders are following a smarter path – they say “Yes” when it makes good business sense, no matter the circumstances.

There are three times you must say “Yes” to make sure your business is capturing the terrific commercial advantages available in down markets and making sure your competitors aren’t beating you to these cyclical opportunities.

Say “Yes” to Business Development Activities

First, you must say “Yes” to some number of business development activities. Good companies are in a constant state of change with the best employees coming up with new ideas all the time and your business development people are undoubtedly trying new things that may or may not have immediately measurable results.

In the business development arena, smart leaders are saying “No” to frivolous business trips and high-end dinners with no business purpose but they realize they must say “Yes” to strategic business development activities that likewise involve travel and

worthwhile expenditures, some of which may well involve high-end dinners.

Trade shows are critical in most industries. For a cost-cutting measure, simply reduce the personnel that attend, eliminate the least productive few, and cut back on the non-strategic entertainment so often characteristic of post-show evenings. The same is true for exploratory meetings with potential partners – if money is tight, just pick the most likely to succeed or deliver high results. Such smart “Yeses” will let your employees and prospects know you’re proactively in play but not wasteful. And your business development team will know that if they stay sharp, you’ll back their play. A great business development person or team is worth their weight in platinum at any company given a six month playing field. The best ones already play by these rules but as it’s such a critical business function, as well as one that can hemorrhage cash – it’s best if you are directly involved. Business development is important and not a secret but, properly executed it is the yeast in any recipe for soaring profits.

Say “Yes” to Necessary or Strategic Capital Expenses

Second, you must say “Yes” to either necessary or strategic capital expenses. The world economy is stuttering as decision maker after decision maker gives an automatic “No” to capital expenses – unless the specific expenditure is a matter of company life or death. Read between the lines and you see this is an ideal buyer’s market. As with business development judgments, consider the merits of capital outlays. It’s one secret of great business leaders that they make smart capital expenditures at the right time; sure,

sometimes a bit of figurative or literal duct tape can finesse you past big capital expenses when money is scarce, but it's the leader who makes the strategic capital bets that wins in the long run.

Obviously you can't give carte blanche to every department for new capital expenses; that would be fiscal insanity in a tough economy and at least poor judgment in a good one. However, consider a memo to each department letting them know you are locating resources for once-in-a-lifetime deals and encouraging them to seek out high return-on-investment opportunities that will require a capital expense approval. It keeps the employees on their toes and sends a message to the market that your company is in play for the long run and making capital investments when it makes great business sense.

Evolved business leaders know that the decisions they make in tough times are true game-changers and that having a knee-jerk "No" reaction to every department, in every capital request case, regardless of merit or need is simply short-sighted and will come back to haunt you in missed opportunities later. This is especially painful and true when your competitor picks up the opportunity you were too capital expense averse to approve.

Say, for instance, the Human Resources Department finds a great deal for a nearly-new convenience shuttle for \$3,000. At this time three grand might seem like three hundred grand, but consider the daily amount you spend in validating prospective employee parking, by paying for gas and an employee stipend each time recruiters travel to a nearby college campus for recruiting purposes and likely you would come out even in the first year.

Now, simply extrapolate that out and you're saving money rather than spending, while a comparable shuttle in boom times

would cost four to six times as much. Throw in a few hundred dollars for magnetic signs bearing the company logo and you've got free advertising and likely tax deductions to boot! This small example exemplifies what's possible, whether it's buying a competitor, purchasing a production line at a bank sale, or any other capital expense allocation.

Say "Yes" to Strategic Hires

An across the board hiring freeze is always bad business and if you see a company doing this, sell their stock. These firms are managed by cowards. As companies across the world are firing, laying off and buying out employees to reflect an amended market, it may seem as if the business world is under a unilateral hiring freeze. You must look past this perception and always say "Yes" to strategic hires.

Consider, for example, a Vice President of Sales from a competitor that recently went out of business. Most companies are thinning the ranks at the top while others have an across the board rule for some time period that no new employees will be brought on. Most companies would say "No" to this applicant.

Again, the evolved business leaders, and we expect you to be one of them, will be on the lookout for exceptional people who weren't available before the economic crisis – especially those who can "pay their way" within just a few months if not in a few weeks. The Sales VP from a bankrupt competitor may well bring a pipeline of new customers who are looking for a new supplier. Say "Yes" to a meeting and snap up the superstars who can immediately pay their way – and with a family to feed, certain lifestyle to support

and limited prospects, they will be grateful for the opportunity. So rather than instituting a hiring freeze, smart business leaders know that a secret for business is to always be hiring. Perhaps you've hired no one in the last four months but you are always interviewing and will pick up a brilliant opportunity immediately every time.

If your company has any policy that involves an automatic "No" response; revisit it. "No" is a roadblock in any language and certainly in the strategies we're discussing here. We're not saying that "No" isn't a valuable response on a case-by-case basis but should never be used as a template for success. You can tell I'm passionate about this one; some of the smartest and worst decisions in the history of business began with saying no to an obvious spectacular strategic hire.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Business leaders have the opportunity and tools to immediately remove roadblocks in their company's path to success. Although it all sounds easy, and technically it is as you are seeing in this book, there is often some personal and business baggage or thought-limitations that must be eliminated before taking out the big problems. Evolved business leaders know it's worth the effort because for the business person, there is no feeling so great as winning in a competitive commercial endeavor.

FIGHTING FIRES INSTEAD OF FIRE PREVENTION

“Many business leaders are fantastic fire fighters; when they enter a company with crises everywhere, their special skillset saves the day. Unfortunately these same business stars haven’t learned to be effective in a crisis prevention role and that skillset is what makes for maximum company success. Evolved leaders are learning both fire fighting and fire prevention.” — Ainslie Waldron

One of the biggest symptoms of a looming roadblock to business success is waiting for a flare-up or fireball to happen (and thus being unable to gauge its potential damage) rather than preparing for it and/or avoiding it in the first place. To continue this simple analogy, there is always smoke before a fire and the same is true in a business setting: symptoms are around if you’re ready to sniff them out.

Most companies wait for a fire to break out – i.e. horrible customer service experiences, an ineffective or outdated website, a different cash crisis every month – and then spend massive resources to put these fires out (with rain checks for unhappy customers, an expensive emergency website revamp, and otherwise pouring money into a problem) rather than simply utilizing fire prevention every single day.

Operating a business is no different from running your car. If you never look under the hood, never change the oil, don't know how long it's been since your last service, never check the tire pressure, use the cheapest grade of fuel or don't have any rubber left on your windshield wipers, is it any wonder your car breaks down on the way to work each month leaving you stranded and frustrated? Is it any wonder you can't see in a rainstorm or don't have a properly-inflated spare when one of your tires goes flat? Any good business leader wouldn't make those mistakes with their automobile, so why would they fail to maintain their business and plan for emergencies?

In a company, of course, there are many more complex working parts than in your automobile whether it's human interaction, synchronizing technology with company goals or forecasting cash flow. I recognize these factors fully, but then why do more evolved companies than yours manage to prevent fires before they break out, given that they have even more moving parts? If they can do it, so can you. Your challenges are not unique.

Service Your Company With These 4 Simple Steps (Before it Needs a Complete Overhaul)

The fact of the matter is that no matter how big or small your company, every department needs to be properly and regularly serviced to avoid what I call "smoldering embers," those warning signs that mean a fire is coming, "flare ups," or those mini-crises that should really be telling you something bigger is on the way, and full-fledged "barn burners" that happen when you've already ignored signs 1 and 2.

So, how do you start preventing fires rather than fighting them? I saw a recent television commercial promoting some business efficiency service but the theme was *What if Firefighters Were Running the Company?* These no-nonsense professionals look instantly for the source of the problem and then do something; the exact methodology the very best, most evolved business leaders possess. So if firefighters created a simple 4-step plan to get your firm back on its feet – fast – it might look something like this:

- **Step 1** – *Be Prepared*: Whether a firefighter is going to rescue a cat from a tree or respond to a five-alarm fire in a fully-engaged warehouse, he or she always is prepared. They have thought out the skills and tools they need for every possible scenario. Firefighting operations are typically the very ideal of well planned efficiency. You, too, should plan and be prepared. That helps you not just stay safe during blazing barn burners of corporate problems but actually take action to avoid them altogether. Firefighters and fire inspectors are constantly looking for situations that could turn into problems. How? By identifying them first.
- **Step 2** – *Identify smoldering embers*: Firefighters know their business and can spot a situation that could flare up. There's a precise analogy in your business; if you take on the specific task of looking for potential flare ups, and now is no different: you can **spot the symptom before it becomes a full-fledged fire**. If customer service complaints are on the rise, there's your "smoldering ember," waiting to break out and scorch the company at any moment. If it's technical difficulties, lack of after-hours support or

employee morale, don't wait for these issues to flare up and burn away your profits before they get your attention. Eliminate these potential flare ups now, while you still have a chance to prevent a fire rather than fight one. I've worked with many management teams in businesses that seem to just go from month to month, facing one "surprise" crisis after another. Every month it is a new surprise. So, guess what? When you're actually expecting it, it's not a surprise! These companies are hitting the same problems year after year; they're just different on a monthly basis and so they incorrectly leap from one fire to the next. If you know they are coming then these are by definition anticipatable situations that can be planned for and should be planned for; they're what we are calling "smoldering embers," those daily, weekly or monthly issues that are always there, quietly aflame under the surface and just ready to "flare up" at any moment. Would you build your house at the foot of a smoking volcano? Searching out those potential flash points is an activity of the evolved executive who knows the secret for business.

- **Step 3** – *Avoid "surprise" flare ups*: So many people think that something that is really a "regularity" is a "surprise" instead, just because it doesn't occur every month. But, some surprises occur annually, and some surprises occur bi-annually, so it's not really a surprise at all. For instance, if your biggest blockage is cash flow, then deal with your biggest blockage first. Deal with your cash flow. Much of this is being realistic, just like the fire fighters. Take the words literally; it is, indeed, looking at how **the cash should flow**.

Cash flow is a very simple concept to understand but you can't operate a business on a hope for the best and don't look ahead cash flow policy. Commercial activity runs on cash, or at least the promise of it, and thus should be something studied daily in your company and variances should be anticipated. Quite simply you look at exactly how much cash is required to run your business and when you must have how much; then understand exactly what your profit margins are which in effect is the extra cash available. You can forecast your turnover, and what it indeed should be to generate the cash flow that you absolutely require to run your business. Business leaders must not base decisions on the cash flow which perhaps looks good on paper, nor the one in your head that you used when your business was just starting, but instead the cash flow plan which includes allowance for the built-in surprise factor. Because, guess what? There *are* surprises every month: that's no secret. And, in fact, if you look at an analysis of the past year or the year before, which you should be doing anyway, and then look at how you're planning for the future, you can work through and determine exactly what your turnover should be, what your profit margin should be, and how your cash flow should work. If the cash isn't flowing during certain periods, and this is your "barn burner" waiting to "flare up," remedy that by aligning your cash flow with the timeline of some of your suppliers, or some of your vendors, or some of your customers. Because, if you're not properly aligned with these entities that either give or receive cash, then smart business leaders re-negotiate with them so that the cash flow terms

will ensure that the cash is available in sufficient amounts when you need it. Your business isn't there to make other businesses float; your business is there to sail on its own and as a business leader it's one of your more important activities to become a forward thinking cash flow planner and make sure there are no potential fires in this critical arena. Smart cash flow strategies are indeed a secret for achieving your maximum business potential.

- **Step 4** – *Make sure you don't burn down the barn:* When fires do break out, be they in the treasury department or the areas of customer service, production or employee morale, you can't relax and do fire prevention at that point; now it's time to contain the fire and put it out before it does any further damage.

The Cost of (Continually) Fighting Fires

Continually, constantly fighting fires is costly in many ways, some quite painful and obvious while others are more subtle but just as troubling. For instance, when every day another crisis looms, employee morale suffers because their faith in you as a business leader wavers. Who wants to work for a boss who can't keep his own ship from constantly running aground?

Likewise in a crisis environment, employee burnout is high, from top to bottom. Everyone gets fed up from backtracking to fix problems that had warning signs months ago, so your middle managers complain to their supervisors, who seek action from their supervisors, and suddenly you can't hear the fire blazing from all the negative commentary going on!

It's hard enough retaining employees when things are going smoothly; try keeping people on when every single day is a constant battle to soothe irate customers, get the products that should have been there yesterday there tomorrow, scrounging money from anywhere you can find it to buy basic inventory or supplies; the list goes and on and on and on.

In short, time spent preventing fires from flaring up is well worth the time, money and effort when you consider how costly those daily flare-ups can be to employee morale, retention and rehiring. Similarly you should note that crises are the rare exception rather than the rule at the most successful companies. Creating and maintaining a no-crisis environment should be your goal and it's a secret for business; your platform will never be perfect as there is always something coming up but these matters are easily addressed without the smokescreen of daily crisis management.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

The evolved executive or business owner who knows the secret for business is at heart a fire fighter. No, she isn't running into burning buildings but rather spotting potential flare-ups in her company and addressing them immediately and with absolute efficiency. Nothing smolders for long as she hardwires the management team to constantly be searching for potential problems as well as opportunities. One less problem frees resources to pursue an additional opportunity. Think like a fire fighter; plan ahead and when something comes up, you're ready to take on the challenge full force. That's the difference between a lagging firm and the type of company you can build with the secret for business.

STATUS QUO IS LATIN FOR NOT EVOLVING: DON'T SETTLE

“If you’re satisfied with the way things are in your company, it’s time for you to retire or head for the next challenge. Companies must be in a constant state of evolution and it’s up to the business leaders to make this evolution a key component of the firm.”

— Ainslie Waldron

Sometimes you don’t have to do anything to erect a barrier to your company’s success. Often, in fact, doing nothing IS the barrier. Many company leaders, for instance, are satisfied with the status quo which is a prescription for never reaching the firm’s maximum potential.

Leaders of these businesses proactively embrace the semi-truism that “if it ain’t broke don’t fix it.” I shudder anytime I hear this phrase, or a grammatically more correct version of the concept, because it’s like a cloud hanging over whatever company is saddled with such a leader. Now I’m not saying you should throw a figurative monkey wrench into a process that’s already flowing smoothly; I’m not here to start trouble where there is none but I am here as an advocate of constant evolution in every part of your business.

Thus, what I *am* saying is that most companies have areas where they could actually do better with a very small amount of effort, even if that area isn't actually in trouble – yet.

Many companies don't take the time or don't have the commitment to learn how to do things better so, instead, they do things as they've always done them, even if the competition is doing them better, differently, smarter, faster or even more efficiently. If your competitor isn't paying attention to these areas you should know that another company is out there that will enter and capture your market when your guard is down.

If You Aren't the Best (Buy), You Might Blow a Circuit (City)

If you don't take notice of what is happening around your office, your department, your production floor or your company in general, particularly in your field and especially in these times that change so quickly, most businesses will become obsolete very quickly.

Take, for instance, the critical difference in how Circuit City responded to the American financial crisis as opposed to its main rival, Best Buy. Where Best Buy seemed to always be first to market by introducing cutting-edge technology or ways to provide customer solutions, such as providing their Geek Squad home setup services or securing exclusive CD releases with popular groups like Guns 'N Roses, Circuit City seemed to do business as usual; nothing special, nothing cool and it was impossible to find someone to help a customer..

They seemed to offer fewer and fewer games although this market remained hot, with modest DVD selection and music

choices even while the big competitor Best Buy expanded their libraries and game offerings. Circuit City stumbled with their own “Fire Dog” home installation services that never quite had the ring, or customer buy-in, of Best Buy’s more popular and well-branded Geek Squad. As a result, Circuit City’s sales shifted downward, then slumped, then plummeted and Circuit City, the once-prominent big box retailer, closed its doors in early 2009.

One might argue that there wasn’t really room for two nearly identical retailers on the crowded marketplace, but then how to explain the success of both Staples and Office Depot, McDonald’s and Burger King, Borders and Barnes ‘N Noble, Target and Wal-Mart?

Companies have individual attitudes and capturing the right company attitude is a secret for business. Conversely if that attitude is *laissez faire*, the sun’ll come out tomorrow, we’ve always done things this way, etc., then even the most gradual gains made by a competitor can eventually overtake and even consume the poor attitude competitor.

Obviously, many different factors went into Circuit City’s demise and I am the first one to reserve judgment but also the first to remember that I could never find a staff person to help; but the important lesson is for us to let their failure be a warning to us all: sometimes what worked yesterday won’t always work tomorrow, especially when tomorrow is uncertain or ill-defined. The company with the keep-up and get-ahead attitude or feel will win every time.

The High Price of Keeping the Status Quo

Circuit City was not the only business to close its doors during the recent financial crisis. Gold-standard eateries like Bennigans

and Steak & Ale shuttered their operations while Linens & Things closed completely and Pier One Imports closed dozens of stores to streamline operations alongside scores of other retailers.

Who's to say in each individual case why some stores closed and others remained open? Why, for instance, did Steak & Ale suffer while other chains like Applebees and TGI Friday's seemed to flourish? What made customers remain loyal to Bed, Bath and Beyond as opposed to the quite similar retailer Linens & Things?

We may never know, exactly, but even the uninitiated can tell you that you can't just respond to market pressure and remain profitable; you have to anticipate it weeks, months and even years in advance.

That is why keeping the status quo is so dangerous to modern businesses. If you're standing still only three things can happen and none of them are good: You'll get run over. Your company will be pushed aside or You will be left behind. To avoid these success killers let's look at some of the specific status quo issues that affect most businesses today.

- **Poor customer service:** Not going above and beyond by keeping your customers happy. If you can't charge lower prices, if you can't hire more people, if you can't extend hours, you can encourage your people to go the extra mile to compensate customers with excellent customer service. If you're like me you immediately take notice of great customer service because one finds it so infrequently and yet it costs so little to deliver. This secret for business success should not remain secret at all – it is critical to achieving maximum success as a company and if you can change

customer service quickly your company can leap forward almost overnight.

- **Inconsistent hiring policies:** Sometimes hiring from within, sometimes hiring from without and, for that matter, not really knowing why you did which on a case-by-case basis can lead to a climate where no-one feels very safe or rewarded for their presence. Clear and transparent hiring and promotion policies from the very inception of your business leadership will let everyone know they are on a level playing field and quality work, team work, and customer service will earn them first consideration for opportunities. This seems so simple but few companies get it right; you should get it right because it's one of the easier secrets to maximizing your company's reach.
- **Lack of feedback for employee performance:** When employees don't know how they are doing, they can often think they're excelling when in actuality they need improvement or they might feel insecure when they are actually rock stars. It's simple business etiquette to formally or informally let people know when they're doing a great job and that you appreciate the extra effort. Similarly it's only right to let employees know when they are not doing their job in the manner you would prefer or are not working up to your expectations. Take the time for honest, friendly feedback and you will typically get what you need as a business leader – your company will be the better for it and morale will soar. But, never, ever reprimand an employee in front of anyone else.
- **Inequality of pay:** When everyone knows what everyone else makes, and find it inconsistent, there is very little incentive

for the underpaid to act like the overpaid, and vice versa. The most egregious example of this would be an inept brother in law making \$160,000 a year while his more-competent next-in-command makes only \$70,000 per year; a guaranteed employee retention problem in the making. So, two things: employee compensation should be confidential but you must accept that people will talk and second, if people are talking they should know that there is some equality in the way pay scales are determined. Compensation is an entire field unto itself but the basic concept for you to use in maximizing your business is that inequality of pay in your firm can damage your prospects.

- **Lack of after-hours help for frustrated consumers:** These days everyone expects 24-7 service, or at least late-night and early-morning response. Having a lag time of 24- to 48-hours is not only inexcusable in this day and age but leads to customer resentment and, equally, customer drop-off. I don't think I am the only one who gets frustrated when I can't find a call-in number when my laptop freezes at 6 AM; the super-service warranty I paid a premium for seems suddenly not so super. Quick response time and the ability to connect with a real person at any hour is something you should be looking into for your firm; of course it doesn't not apply to hair salons but it surely applies to anything related to technology.
- **Not following the company vision:** When asked, every member of your firm should be able to concisely say what the company does, where it's going, and what their specific contribution is to that effort. This only makes sense but I

rarely see it when I go in to help a company. If the leaders are good, and do have a vision, the next step of letting people know what it is and how they fit in is just logical. Try it, it's a secret for business. You'll soon notice the results in improved marketing materials, company-wide focus, clear vision and clear messages, sending consistent signals to your employees, and your customers as well. If you are following the secret formula for maximizing business success woven into this book, in six months an outsider should be able to walk up to your operations head, any customer service representative, the marketing person who started last month, or anyone else in your company and learn about the company vision. This is one test to see if you are operating at the company's maximum potential.

- **No true mission statement:** There are volumes written on this subject but my specific take on it is if creating the mission statement is disconnected from the vision and operations of the company, it is a complete waste of time. It is also a waste of time writing a mission statement unless employees in every area of your company can relate to it. So often I have seen the mission statements of larger companies only understood by the management teams. Losing the rest of your staff is a huge mistake. This type of behavior by management can be viewed as arrogance by non managerial staff and can encourage rifts and disconnects in companies. However, if your mission statement is short and concise while being seamlessly aligned with the functioning of your company, and is fully understood and appreciated by everyone in the company – it's a great attribute.

- **Inadequate plan for the future:** Nothing screams “status quo” like an unclear, inadequate or even nonexistent plan for the future. Why should employees stick around if it’s always going to be “just like this”? And, frankly, why should you? Smart planning for the future is a secret for business.

In addition to this far-from-comprehensive list, there are many, many different status quo issues I have come across in the work I have done over the years. What is the solution to breaking the old mold and trying something new?

Looking at each issue and addressing them, simply tweaking each one a little, can have a wonderful, multi-pronged effect by which it works exponentially in terms of if you just tweak two or three or five things a little, you can get a huge improvement in your business. As we saw earlier in this chapter, each company has an attitude, some call it the biz vibe; you know what it is and you know when it is there, whether you’re an employee, a customer, or a business leader. The concept of status quo has no place in your company – moving forward pays off in countless ways and it’s the only way to achieve the maximum company success.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Great companies constantly evolve. Investors, leaders, employees, customers and suppliers are all proud to be part of the evolution and each knows their place in that evolution. Remember that the Theory of Evolution isn’t survival of the fittest; more specifically the survivors are those that can best adapt to change. Maximum business success requires evolved leaders of evolving companies. Evolution is a good thing.

WAITING FOR THE “RIGHT” TIME TO CHANGE

“The biggest temptation for business leaders in an economic downturn is to say ‘No’ to any new request for capital, every less-than-certain new initiative or plan to enter new markets. To me this is a recipe for slow painful business death. The more evolved business leaders are following a smarter path – they say ‘Yes’ when it makes good business sense.” — Ainslie Waldron

Now more than ever, timing is everything. As world finances are in turmoil and the Great American Recession teeters over a potentially much-worse financial abyss, some business leaders are asking themselves, “Is this the right time for change?” and those are the more evolved leaders. Many will not even consider the idea of positive proactive change.

What they should be asking themselves is, “Can I afford *not* to change?!?”

Don’t Wait for Change to Come to You

Most people always have an idea that they are just waiting until the time is right to launch. Most people, I find, have at least one and sometimes several great ideas, waiting for just the right time

to bring them to market. Well, guess what? The time is never just right. But, particularly in this climate when competitors are pulling back, there is probably **no better time to launch a new initiative for your business.**

While the glass-is-half-empty people are seeing businesses decline, are watching markets dissipate and disappear, some, and it should also be you, are just looking for new ventures, and I think it is probably a great time, a great opportunistic time to launch something new. That idea that you have had and you have just been waiting for the right time, why not choose now as the right time? Make a plan, test it out now. You might be surprised at the results in this very different environment. It's a lot like the near-zero gravity on the moon. When there is nothing to act as an invisible force holding back a new idea, it can cover some amazing market distance!

Of course, timing really IS everything and it should be a key part of your analysis of any new commercial strategy. Launching a product before it's ready, printing the brochure or launching the website before it has been proofread, these are all very simple barriers to success you can clearly see – and avoid.

But what if the product is seasonal or time sensitive, say the new swimwear line in time for the National Surf Show? Or the new brochure must be printed by a certain day – ready or not – to make it to the convention sales floor by 9 a.m. on opening day?

When it comes to timing, we can't look at a mere date and point fingers if something doesn't go right; we have to move further upstream to ask why wasn't the product ready when we knew all along it had to be done by this date? Or why wasn't the brochure proofread if we knew months in advance it had to be

done by absolutely no later than such and such a time on such and such a date?

Readiness versus Timing

As we consider the critical element of timing in the business concept, it might be helpful for you to think in terms of **Readiness versus Timing**. After all, it's never good to launch something before it is fully ready but on the other hand nothing is ever 100%; often 99% is good enough but the point here is that readiness is not always dependent on time. For instance, if those new super tech hiking shoes your company just developed are fully ready for launch, why wait until winter to unveil them?

Get a jump on the competition by putting them out well in advance of winter in order to get some fresh publicity, the kinks out of the ordering website, some new videos up on You Tube and a host of other great new opportunities you can turn to your advantage rather than waiting four to six months for the height of hiking season.

Here are some main distinctions between readiness and timing:

- **Readiness** is a state of being;
- **Timing** is a date on the calendar.

By all means, every season has a reason and the calendar can be a valuable planning tool, but more important than a circled date on the calendar is a product, idea or service that is ready and waiting to be revealed, either to your company, the market or the world at large.

- **Readiness** is making sure the product is ready;
- **Timing** is making sure the market is ready.

A ready product, an idea whose time has come, a service the company can get behind, push and sell is timeless. When will the market be ready? Whenever you *say* it's ready. If you stop and think about it you have remarkable control over both readiness and timing in most business situations.

- **Readiness** is being ready;
- **Timing** is being on time.

Have you ever read an unfinished book in manuscript form, previewed a film before the sound effects were finished or listened to a CD before it's been properly mastered? For most the answers to each of these questions is No; this is because the entertainment industry is very careful about when and in what state of readiness their products are released.

Take, for instance, the annual rush of Christmas CDs that flood the market every winter. If you have ever read the liner notes carefully, you'll see that most new songs are recorded in June or July, assuring the record companies ample time to produce, equalize, filter, synthesize, even re-record if necessary before the CDs finally hit the record and department store shelves or iTunes files in late October to early November.

If you notice, “word” of the artist’s “new” holiday release often gets “leaked” as early as August or September, so even though this is one case where timing really IS everything – who wants to listen to a Christmas album in June??? – the artists give themselves plenty

of time to make sure the product is ready, willing and able to enter the market to achieve the most success.

- **Readiness** can be managed differently;
- **Timing** is the same every year.

In the last chapter we looked at not being surprised by regular events. Christmas comes on the same date every year, so it should never surprise anybody and yet for every holiday album that hits the store shelves I imagine there are dozens more gathering dust because somebody – or several somebodies – just could not get the product ready on time, regardless of having the date circled on a calendar months in advance.

So merely knowing when something is going to happen isn't enough; we have to be ready for it as well. Which begs my original question: if YOU are ready – if your product, service, idea, company or innovation is ready – don't wait for the “right” time to move on any or all of the above.

The right time is quite simply – when you're ready.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

While traditional business wisdom claims timing is everything, I suggest the true secret for business is taking that truism one step further. Timing is critical in the launch of any new business initiative but the best business leaders know that Timing plus Readiness is what makes for the most successful business wins. For maximum business success business leaders must assert maximum control over the process of getting ready; effectively being prepared to extract the maximum benefit for your company when the timing is right.

LISTENING TO OTHER PEOPLE VERSUS DOING WHAT OTHER PEOPLE TELL YOU

“The very best business leaders are always the very best listeners; they never need to show off how much they know or flaunt their power. To lead the most successful business, evolved leaders are constantly gathering input and information for the best possible ultimate decision.” — Ainslie Waldron

Listening is a skill critical to every business leader. By proactively listening we are made aware of many things: industry gossip, new information, relevant facts, subtleties, the positive, and the negative.

Evolved business leadership is knowing what to listen to and what to filter out in our TMI society (Too Much Information).

Among all of the exceptional business leaders I have met over the past 20 years, the trait I most admire is the ability to really *listen*; when it's important. To make best use of this concept we must distinguish between listening to other people and doing what other people tell you to do rather than making informed decisions of your own after listening to the best possible opinions offered by solid information sources.

Evolved leaders know the best thing to do is to listen to everything, but make a very, very determined decision yourself, based on fact, knowledge and also your determination to succeed. There is definitely an element of intuition here; which likely is what helped you along to a position of business leadership in the first place.

The best leaders are not swayed by popular opinion, by the crowd, by the grumbling or, for that matter, the sycophancy often found in corporate leadership structures. Instinct or intuition is a universal language that many possess, but too few listen to – out of fear. Instinct got you to start a business, try a new idea, create a great product or at least license it for distribution; the leader who will achieve maximum success lets that same instinct guide them when listening to others.

Filter Out the Fear

Now here is the challenge: you have gathered great information because you're a good listener but now to be a leader of any sort you must make the final decision. That's what leadership is all about. The roadblock that many business leaders hit is right here. They have so much information that they are actually afraid of making a final decision. A voice in their head, the one that holds people back from success, tells you to get just a little more information. The voice tells you to hold off on a decision until you have talked to absolutely everyone. This is the voice of fear and a possibly paralyzing business roadblock. You must filter out the fear in business decision making.

Don't get me wrong; some fear is absolutely, 100% warranted. When you're walking alone in a dark alley at night, fear is absolutely

something you should be listening to! But too often, for too long, we grow fearful of everything. But fear kills opportunity and, as such, is one of the biggest roadblocks to our success.

Fear makes us doubt ourselves, makes us question not just a few things but everything. If we listen to fear often enough, we lose all hope of filtering out the bad fear from the good; we don't just jump in dark alleys or in the middle of the night, we jump at everything, all the time.

All the most successful business people I have met learn to do one amazing thing: **they eventually abolish that fear**. It is not a part of their standard operating procedure; it is no longer in their makeup to react out of fear. They don't let it slow them down or hold them back. They simply don't work through fear. They work through strategizing instead, they work through vision setting, they work through planning, and they work through determination.

Now, you can listen to the cautions of other people, certainly; the world is full of able and talented mentors, but also put it through your own filters. When I was young, I learned early on that I had a quite high IQ. And that gave me a wonderful, wonderful backbone, which meant I had no fear of asking dumb questions. I had no fear at all of being the one in the classroom or later, in the business, that asked the dumb question. I knew I was a quick learner, I was lucky to know it was a proven fact that I wasn't dumb; it was wonderfully freeing not to be afraid to ask those questions that would enhance my learning, my understanding or my wisdom.

So often when I asked the questions that everyone else wanted to but were afraid to (for fear of sounding dumb), people would say, "I'm so glad you asked that, we were frightened to do so ourselves."

So many people, I think, work in fear and most people live their life that way, which is so sad, because all the successful business people I know **do not work that way**. Yes, they listen to others. Yes, they can heed warnings. But, they still have a determined plan and vision in mind and will determine when and how to attack and when to go ahead and take that “calculated risk”.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

In my experience, the best thing a business leader can do is to listen to all possible input, but when it's time to do it, make a very, very determined decision yourself, based on fact, knowledge and also your determination to succeed. Intuition plays a part; getting past fear does too but at the end of the day this secret for maximum business success is to quite simply listen and then act based on fact, not fear.

PART

THREE



HEALING THE BUSINESS (WHILE HEALING YOURSELF)

“Like great healers throughout history, the business healer is revered in our society – exactly as they should be. With practice and effort almost any business leader can identify and quantify the challenges or roadblocks in their company but the people who really shine and can take their business to the next level and then the next are these healers. Sometimes it’s an art and at other times it’s a science but healing your business is the first step forward toward maximum business success.” — Ainslie Waldron

Every spring, just like clockwork, I get a nasty little cold. Not a flu, not a sinus infection, not the croup, just a plain, old, ordinary cold. And every year it interrupts whatever I am doing, for as long as it lasts.

Usually I’m only down for four or five days, but as all of us in business know, four or five days can seem like a lifetime when the phone is ringing, the emails are piling up in their queue, the company processes start falling out of tune; all as deadlines loom.

As for the cold, it's uncomfortable at best; just enough to leave me feeling woozy and foggy in the brain, stuffed up and tossing and turning. When I first get sick, it's like the first time it has ever happened; the sore throat, the headache, the general but vaguely "I don't feel quite myself" notion seems so foreign as if this has never have happened before.

Then the scratch in my throat turns to fire and the dull throb in my head turns to concrete and the sniffing and sneezing kicks into overdrive and I find myself standing in line at the pharmacy with the usual over-the-counter remedies before checking into bed for the next 72 hours. Midway through the virus absolutely nothing feels good, body, mind or soul; there's no way to get comfortable and even breathing becomes a nightmare. The affliction feels like it will last forever.

I shiver and shake and alternately sweat and kick off the sheets, grumble about missed sleep and too many pills and then, suddenly, seemingly miraculously, the fever breaks and the congestion clears and the muscles relax and I enter into the healing phase; when all is right with the world and my body can get back to normal.

This illness – recovery progression is absolutely analogous to where we are with this book right now. You have identified the various "symptoms" keeping you back and spotted those areas where you could experience some healing power; well, here comes the power. The power of healing!

Two Types of Healing; All Types of Success!

This third section will focus on two areas of healing that are so critical to your business's success:

1. Healing the Business
2. Healing Yourself

And if you think you can do one without the other, I've got news for you: you can't. Healing your business is an extremely personal act that goes hand-in-hand with healing yourself. When you feel better about healing these various symptoms, road blocks, barriers and detours we have pinpointed so far in this book, your business will do better; when your business does better, you will feel better; more empowered and with more vision than ever before.

In this section we will look at several critical ways to heal both your business and yourself, including guaranteed re-launch strategies, team results, Return On Investment, how to give – and take – feedback and even that critical employee buy-in. Although seemingly disparate concepts, they have one thing in common and that is they are each part of the healing process for a business.

Yes, change can be like getting that annual cold virus; uncomfortable, unpleasant and no fun at all. But like a spring cold, change is also temporary; it won't last forever and the results you will gain from healing your business – and yourself – will make both you and your company stronger, healthier and more successful than ever. So, let's look at the changes.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

The power that comes to great business leaders is based on many things but the real power is when you have the ability to heal a business. It's not magical and it isn't often an overnight effort, but this business healing is the precise path to achieving maximum business success in six months or less. It's a secret for business.

GUARANTEED RE-LAUNCH STRATEGIES

“Certainly it’s smart to cut expenses when sales are down but evolved companies simultaneously invest a meaningful amount in the highest profit areas of their business.” — Ainslie Waldron

I understand why people are so resistant to change; it can be awkward, cause anxiety, even fear, and produce stress on many levels. But as someone who has personally witnessed change come into the lives of literally hundreds of newly-successful companies throughout the course of my career, I can say that those same companies who feared change before welcome it, even celebrate it, once they have seen how wonderfully liberating it can be.

It’s impossible to think that you can find more success without changing something about the way you are currently doing business. That’s like taking the same walk every morning and expecting to wind up somewhere else, or hoping to see a different view along the way.

But change can be particularly healing, especially when you open yourself up to it and, instead of focusing on “fixing something bad” remain positive about the prospect and consider it, instead, “making something good a little – or even a lot – better.”

Chances are, your company has many wonderful things going for it as we speak. Dedicated employees, a valuable product or service, intelligent board members or executives, energy, hope, enthusiasm, determination.

Oftentimes when sales are sluggish, profits are low or times are bad, we start to focus on the negative versus the positive. In some ways, this is fine; it's one way to pay more attention to those road blocks and barriers that might be holding us back from succeeding even more.

In other ways, focusing on the negative tends to create an atmosphere of “doom and gloom” where everything is questioned, every employee is suspect, every decision is second-guessed and everybody feels doomed to failure.

Making Change Easier to Swallow

Change is inevitable, particularly if success is your goal. And when it comes to healing your company, change is the very best medicine! Of course, few of us like the taste of medicine and so, even as adults, we swallow cherry-flavored cough syrup and pills designed with minty-tasting “cool burst” shells.

Business does not have to be any different; we can often ease people's fears about change by calling it something else; in this case, a re-launch. A re-launch can be anytime you choose to remedy a situation, start a project over, start a new project, usher in a new era, make a new hire, or several.

For instance, if you have focused on “low employee morale” as one of your company's major roadblocks to success, a re-launch of your HR Department's “Employee Rewards Program” – even if

there isn't such a thing and you are just starting it now – could be just the shot in the arm your employees need.

Re-Launch for Renewal!

Even the sound of “Re-launch” is invigorating. The idea creates energy and excitement for yourself, your employees and your customers. Giving your company, product, service or even an entire department a re-launch gives you cause to celebrate, rather than feel anxious or fearful. Let's look at four success strategies for making any re-launch successful. Remember that Re-launch can happen in any area of your company and in any activity. What are the four ways to assure success?

- 1. Give it a name:** People love something they can rally behind, something that rises to the level of a campaign they can invest in and a “name” they can use to quickly tag just what it is they are so excited about. When you identify a roadblock and enact a specific strategy to erase it, this really IS reason to celebrate. Whether it's just revamping a company process, installing your first 24-7 customer service phone line or even giving the corporate office an external facelift to make it more recognizable from the road, naming the project can go a long way toward making it an even more successful re-launch. Governments learned this long ago and it's no secret among military leaders that a named operation has a better chance of success. You might call your business re-launch plan “Operation **fill in the blank**,” as in “Operation Customer Service” or “Operation Building Facelift.” Maybe

you'd prefer "Our 2010 Customer Service Campaign" or "Our Construction Campaign." Regardless of the name you give your re-launch, it might seem banners or placards are silly but in reality they are a great way to market your re-launch plans to the people who will be carrying them out. Just as you see at Target Stores, new initiatives have big signage; take yours and post them around the building so people can see that not only are you excited about the re-launch, but they should be, too and it is visibly quantifiable.

2. **Give it a timeline:** Enthusiasm is like the gas in a helium balloon; it goes stale after awhile. When you are doing a re-launch, be it major or minor, it is important to have a firm timeline with an exact finish line definition in place and, even more importantly, that you make employees aware of this timeline. Involve everyone actively; say in a "Campaign Customer Service Countdown" where a giant calendar in the break room, cafeteria or main lobby lets them know you are only days, or weeks, away from revamping the entire customer service department, call center or corporate message. Again, these seem like small things you might see on an episode of the Office series but I cannot stress the importance of selling your strategies using posters, banners or a parade if appropriate. I implemented some of these strategies when I was consulting for the United Nations so if it's good enough for the top delegates from many of the world's most powerful countries – go ahead and put up the posters; you'll get big rewards in terms of group buy in.
3. **Give it a deadline:** The most important part of a timeline is a deadline. The worst thing you can have is what I call a

“recurring re-launch,” where you start and stop and start and stop and, eventually, no one believes anything will ever actually change. Re-launches can’t be recurring; they need to be a specific initiative with both a start and finish date to let both employees and customers know that you are serious about the changes you’re trying to implement, and not just giving them lip service that expires long before the change actually happens.

4. **Give it time:** Not every re-launch goes perfectly the first time out of the gate; actually almost none ever go exactly as planned. That expensive 24-7 customer service call center the company was so excited about might experience a few glitches during the first 24-, 48- or even 72-hours; good business leaders know this is only to be expected. Construction might be completed on your corporate facelift project by its deadline, but the sign may be faulty and need new bulbs that are only available from an Australian company before it works perfectly. More important than these technical or even cosmetic changes that will take time to “heal” properly are the mental and cultural changes that need to occur concurrently within the organization; these can take time as well. Never make your timeline so inflexible so as not to permit these unforeseeable challenges.

“Under New Management” (When it Comes to a Re-Launch, Size Doesn’t Matter)

Every company, regardless of size, can benefit from a re-launch; anytime, any department, for any reason. I have found re-launches

to completely revitalize many of the companies I have consulted with, with very little effort on behalf of staff or ownership. The secret is to make changes by simply focusing the power already existing within your company. Laser focus on the rollout of a re-launch strategy will assure success and such focus is quite achievable for relatively short defined time periods.

Sometimes a re-launch can be purely cosmetic. Have you ever passed by a store or restaurant with a banner hanging out front that says, “Under New Management”? That is a re-launch; the exciting part is not the banner or the labor behind hanging it up, but the attitude that exciting word “new” brings to the project; any project.

One truly evolved executive I’ve had the pleasure of working with has an Under New Management desk sign; it’s the first thing everyone sees in his office and the first thing he sees every morning. He’s been at the same company with the same sign for 15 years but he makes a point of maintaining an Under New Management attitude every business day.

Every time you want to do something new, start a new idea, revamp an old department, launch a new project or simply float a new idea, trumpet it where it belongs: in the break room, on your door, on the front door! Take a note from the entertainment industry and put the spotlight on the new project. People want to get involved in something cool, something visible and something certain to have measurable impact. Meet this personal need for your people and you’ll be astounded at the results.

The extra benefit is that enthusiasm is contagious and I dare *you* not to get excited too. Excited, happy people working on something they perceive as cool will take your business to its

maximum success in six months or less – I guarantee it; it's a secret for business.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Big visible fun change can happen at any company; it's what employees hope for when they join a new firm. They want something exciting and to feel part of something cool. The smart business leader provides them with this excitement in every project; each new initiative and they constantly re-launch to generate continuing enthusiasm. Mundane activities can become campaigns; the evolved leader understands and uses this secret for business.

TEAM RESULTS WITHOUT TEAM PITFALLS

“I think high school basketball coaches would make exceptional business leaders; they understand the fundamental distinction between being called a team and playing like a team. They understand that morale is not a tired old concept but rather a necessary factor for success. The smartest business people I have met coincidentally played sports in high school and learned how to generate team spirit; in business it’s an unstoppable force.”

— Ainslie Waldron

Every business leader knows that teamwork is critical to success, but just as every pro has its cons, every team has its pitfalls. For one thing, teams are slower to respond to change than individuals; being politically correct and/or sensitive to various team members, or even the team as a whole, makes conversations more challenging and complex. Even where to go to lunch can become a reason for another dreaded conference call when a team, rather than an individual, is involved. The ability to cut through this nonsense is a characteristic of great business leaders; teams can become bureaucratic roadblocks or they can lead the company to business victory: employee (team) buy in is key to making this happen.

5 Simple Steps to Employee Buy-In

What if I were to tell you that you could get all the benefits of great team results without the usual team pitfalls? You can, you know; all you have to do is follow these five easy steps:

- **Step 1 – *Identify the Team:*** When teams have a distinct identity, they are not only more easily identified – and empowered – but also can then be treated more individually. Identifying the team means more than just calling it by a name, “The Leadership Team,” “The Development Team,” or “The Re-Launch Team,” but also defining its unifying purpose, i.e. leadership, development, or re-launch. A team with a purpose is more likely to stay focused. Everyone should know what team they are on, what that team does, and their position on the team.
- **Step 2 – *Enable the Team:*** When a team has power to act on its own, it is less likely to be hesitant and more likely to, in fact, act at all. Let the team know, right from the outset, your desires and expectations for its performance; be clear in your timelines, your deadlines, your benchmarks and your deliverables and monitor them accordingly. Within those guidelines, set the team free to do its best! Business leaders who understand the power of a team to achieve results beyond what any individual could accomplish allow these teams a degree of autonomy. Simply knowing this to be the attitude of company management empowers team members to greater heights.
- **Step 3 – *Invest in the Team:*** A team without resources can never accomplish the goals it sets, period. One reason many

teams fail is because there are so many mixed messages between not only its members but its leadership that it is nearly doomed from the start. Letting your team know that you support them, both financially and with management resources, is one way to send the signal that you are literally invested in the success of the team's mission.

- **Step 4 – Monitor the Team:** Many teams waste time, energy, opportunity and certainly money because simple human nature is such that “when the cat’s away, the mice will play.” Trusting a team to its own devices is not a wrong thing, in fact, it is quite necessary; but that trust should never have to go unsupervised. Make sure to monitor the team regularly, if not frequently, but just as importantly let the team KNOW you will be monitoring them. The requirement of regular reporting simply makes good business sense.
- **Step 5 – Empower the Team:** The team, any team, needs to know it has the power to act on its joint ideas and enthusiasm, within reason. Micro-managing becomes difficult, if not downright unproductive, when teams are involved because of all the multilayered personalities and politics. You hired the team to do a job and now must trust them to do just that. By using these tips in tandem you can both trust and monitor the team to make sure that really happens.

Why Teamwork Matters

Healing your business, however sick it may have been or even how healthy it appears to be, can't happen in a vacuum. Just

because you're feeling great about some recent company news, an investment that paid off or a burden that's been lifted, doesn't mean the whole company shares in that victory.

I say, "Share the victory!"

What is a company if not a team, and what is a team without its leader? I'm not saying the whole company needs to hear about every intimate detail of last night's meeting with a new partner or last week's stock value escalation, but when you are doing one thing and the team is doing another, both are likely to suffer. Keep people up to date on big picture victories and progress; after all it's all the result of teamwork.

We often hear of holistic healing which is, for lack of a better term, healing the whole versus the pieces or parts. In other words, to heal a headache you don't just address the ear lobes or temple but the actual cause of the headache itself, be it ingesting MSG, experiencing too much stress, not getting enough exercise, etc.

Well, you should look at a little holistic healing in business if you want to become an evolved leader who pilots her business to maximum success; quickly. If your company is bouncing back from a few barriers or roadblocks, or even still reeling from the shock that barriers and roadblocks exist, don't be shy about the ongoing recovery. Provide current and period updates so everyone on the team knows exactly what's going on; good, bad or indifferent. Ideally, there will be ever-increasing reports of the good.

Depending on the size of your company the communications strategies are necessarily different. A small company can have a monthly luncheon where team leaders announce important results; a mid size company might send a memo to everyone with information and thanks where appropriate. Such simple steps to

keep the team informed helps to build the team while creating true teamwork on every level. This is truly healing at its finest and an important secret for business.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Leaders of great companies, whether a two-person shop or a 200 person corporation, have the skills of great sports coaches. They know they're leading a team; not just a roster of employees. They consistently earn and create employee team buy-in because they know that effective teamwork is possibly the most important element to taking a company to its maximum success.

WIN, WIN - PROFIT

“A truly evolved company makes a strong strategic bet on their highest margin and most profitable products or services especially in bad economic times. The returns can be immense because your less evolved competitors are too often focused solely only on lowering expenses.”

— Ainslie Waldron

Nothing heals an ailing business, or leads to more success, more than increasing income and great cash flow. The mere presence of profit can energize your company and its employees in an almost magical way.

Healing your company from within is designed to tear down road blocks or break down barriers to your success; when the barriers are removed, success comes more easily and, just as importantly, more profitably.

Win - Win - Profit

In the case of your company, when you heal from within by breaking down your company’s barriers to success, you have what I always look for in business solutions: a win-win-profit situation:

- **Win:** By knocking down, fixing, patching or even replacing a barrier to your company's success, it no longer exists. What was broken is fixed; what was wrong is right. Now your company operates like a finely tuned engine and work can proceed as planned but in a more efficient and profitable manner.
- **Win:** Additionally, by knocking down, fixing, patching or replacing that barrier you haven't just fixed a problem, but you have opened yourself up to further success because now you can focus the energy that the barrier or road block was draining – from you, from employees, from an entire department, from research, from development, from creativity and surely from cash reserves – onto more productive areas by moving forward. Focusing all these newly available resources on opportunities rather than challenges is absolutely a benefit to applying the secrets of business you're finding in these chapters.
- **Profit:** When what is broken is fixed, when the ailment has been healed, you are free to maximize profit once again. The win-win scenario of a barrier removed and a company healed is just the right formula you need to begin focusing on what is really important for commercial success – profit.

What Looks Like Profit... Feels Like Profit

I see many newly barrier-free business leaders absolutely glow with news of newfound profits but it's important to note here that the evolved leader continues to make sure that all good news, not just profit, is shared throughout the company and credit is given where credit is due.

For instance, a new online initiative might bring 100,000 new visitors to your ecommerce site although your buying cycle might be six months or longer. In this case there are no immediate profits per se but there is assuredly good news. Enjoy and share your successes in every area of the company – they will lead to your maximum profits ultimately, so make sure everyone has a good time on the ride.

Be certain to let everyone know that what they're doing is working, or building a foundation for future profits, sooner rather than later. Numbers work as well as dollars and cents, and everyone works harder when they know what they're doing is actually producing quantifiable results!

THE SECRET SUMMARY

A healed company with no roadblocks to success is a thing of beauty; quite similar to a finely tuned engine in a classic car. When all cylinders are operating flawlessly and there's an open road ahead, the feeling is exhilarating. So, too is piloting a newly barrier-free company on its road to maximum business success. Enjoy the ride; enjoy the profits and make sure your team gets to share the feeling. These are the results of the secrets for business.

BELIEVABLE FEEDBACK PRODUCES UNBELIEVABLE RESULTS

“Successful business leaders hardwire a feedback system into their firm’s working environment. Employees are empowered to thrive when they are not obsessed by ‘how they’re doing’ or what their boss might think. When everyone knows what is expected and where they stand; that’s the foundation for a business Dream Team. Consistent evaluative and corrective feedback is a secret for business.”— Ainslie Waldron

The term “feedback” has received a bad rap around the workplace lately, and with good reason. That’s because people often equate feedback, wrongly, with criticism; and this is likely because those giving the feedback focus on the negative rather than creating a communication channel for corrective action...

When I began writing this book I struggled with striking just the right tone in my introductory comments. I didn’t want to come off as seeing the world with rose-colored glasses, but I also didn’t want to spend too much time focusing on the negative aspects of a company’s challenges either. How could I begin a book about identifying and healing barriers to success on a positive note?

Well, it proved easier than I thought. After all, it's safe to assume that anyone interested in reading a book called *The Ultimate Secret for Business* certainly is hungry for knowledge, understanding, maybe even wisdom and, as a natural byproduct, SUCCESS. So already we were both headed in the same direction, you and I. Once I found common ground in where to begin, setting a positive tone became 1,000 times easier.

Well, your employees are no different; it's a matter of getting everyone efficiently going in the same direction and it takes feedback to make this happen.

Six Tips for Giving Effective Feedback

When you say "I'd like to give you some feedback on that" and employees immediately cringe, it's a good signal that you've been doing it wrong. So what is the "right" way to let employees know how they are doing, even if it's not so well? These six tips should make your communication easier, more effective and vastly more likely to produce an overall positive result:

- 1. Create an alliance:** The employee receiving the feedback needs to know that "you are in this together" so that he or she doesn't feel isolated, alone or even cornered. The feeling you're looking for: that of the high school coach I often refer to who gives constructive corrective advice and players accept and implement the suggestions without any bad feelings. Remember that, whether you're their CEO, CFO, leader or middle manager, employees are often intimidated when forced to sit or stand still and receive "feedback" on

their performance. Taking the stigma out of it by giving the feedback in a casual setting, or even in a casual tone, can go a long way toward making you feel like equals. Remember that you are perceived as a person who has the power to take away their job which is how they feed their family; one of the top ten fears in a recent study was listed as the fear of a job loss. That's a powerful emotion and you should keep it in mind as you decide how to address feedback.

2. **Don't try to be their friend:** Just because you're working to develop a new, more positive attitude about feedback doesn't mean you have to relinquish your role as leader; don't be their friend. Let them know that feedback is important, but so is their performance. This informal get together to let an employee know about various issues, good or bad, you may have with their performance is not an excuse to hit the sports bar next door or laugh at the latest break room gossip. How you deliver feedback should be natural and comfortable to you and accurately reflect your overall leadership style. Consistency will go a long way toward removing the fear of feedback and thus open effective communication channels.
3. **Offer suggestions:** Feedback without suggested corrective action is useless and perhaps even counterproductive. Absent of the offering of an alternative course of action, how will employees know what to do to perform their job better and to your satisfaction? Giving feedback should follow a simple structure: greeting to pleasantries to feedback to suggestion to resolution (see below). This way feedback is easier for you, and for the employee.

- 4. Determine deadlines:** When you tell an employee he needs to start getting to work on time or that she needs to be more pleasant when answering the phone, all will be for naught if there is no follow-through. One easy way to make sure your feedback is heeded is to let the employee know that you will have a follow-up discussion just to confirm that, in fact, their behavior has changed and/or performance has improved. This can be couched as a way for both of you to make sure what you're asking is possible and to get any feedback from the counseled employee on any challenges that came up for them when implementing your suggestions.
- 5. Deliver results:** Feedback is not designed to be empty words given to get back more empty words in return; there must be a specific “result” keyed into the feedback to make it most effective. And it can't be all one-sided; you have to give a little as well as receive. When you offer an employee a suggestion (see Tip # 3), follow up on his or her performance with a deliverable of your own. Often merely saying something like, “Let's check back in with each other next Friday” is enough of a firm result to give the feedback some bite. You can even add a caveat like, “I'm hoping we can resolve this by next Wednesday at close of business. If not, we may have to rethink your position/performance...” Again, this is not a time for empty, or even perceived, threats; it IS a time for results. When employees know there will be repercussions for noncompliance or unimproved performance, they are more likely to take your feedback seriously. As with many things in business, this is an art rather than a science with a thousand human variables in

every situation – follow these basic guidelines and as an evolved leader you’ll achieve your goals.

- 6. Give feedback in good times and bad:** The main reason your employees cringe at the word “feedback” is because it’s most often given in bad times, not good. Change things up by remembering that employees learn as much from positive feedback – if not more – than they do from negative feedback. We don’t want to coddle or endlessly congratulate our employees if nothing congratulatory-worthy has occurred, but it’s important to let people know when they’ve done things right as well as when they may be doing something wrong. If you deliver positive feedback in the same format, manner and setting as negative, you’re creating an environment where “feedback meetings” are no longer feared and merely seen as what they are: tools to make sure everyone is going in the same direction with the right amount of effort.

Don’t Starve Your Employees to “Feedback Death”

Some of these tips may seem obvious to you; others may even seem unnecessary. You may even wonder why you need to give feedback in the first place. You are busy and one more administrative task seems a great deal to ask; but take my word for it – feedback is a necessary component of taking your business to the next level. One reason is that your employees are not mind readers; they need to know what you expect of them so that they can achieve it. How will they know what you expect – or how they’re doing in that regard – if you don’t tell them?

Feedback is a lot like starting a diet without stepping on a scale. Well, how will you ever know if you've lost – or gained – weight if you don't know what your starting point? Likewise, your people need to know where they start, how they're progressing and see that light at the tunnel on the way to the end.

Feedback isn't yet another soft skill or luxury; feedback produces observable results that can be measured in a variety of ways, to include employee morale, increased output, met deadlines and even employee retention rates. The whole concept of effective feedback is analogous to driving a boat; constant modest corrections to keep the boat on a direct path to its destination. Accept that it's necessary and do it well; your company will profit from the effort.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Giving (and receiving) employee feedback can be one of the most powerful business tools. Used incorrectly it will create a climate of fear that will restrict your business; done correctly and for the right reasons, feedback can establish a coach-key player relationship between managers and their staff. Everyone contributing to the game winning play, quality feedback is a necessary secret for maximizing your business success.

EMPLOYEE BUY-IN IN EVERY DEPARTMENT

“I have found that an effective way to spot problems in any business is to ask very straightforward questions; when I get anything less than a straightforward response I know this is an area needing attention.” — Ainslie Waldron

When healing your company, and yourself, you can’t just have a few employees who are enthusiastic about the change; everyone, in every department, needs to be on board for the “cure” to work.

It’s a little like your body’s white blood cells. These little miracle workers are the human body’s internal defense system; when a virus, a foreign body, or even simply a “stranger” gets into the delicate human body, the white blood cells respond not only by vigorously attacking the body’s invader and disposing of it quickly and effectively, but they also remember the invader and begin to build up an immunity to it so you aren’t affected the next time it tries to invade, hence the white blood cells are the backbone of our body’s “immune” system.

Well, how would this system work if only a few of the white blood cells decided to show up the next time a virus, germ or

cellular “bad guy” tried to break through the immune system? Could you ward off a cold, flu or infection if only the “goody-goody” white blood cells decided to show up and fight? Hardly; you need all your white cells, working in concert, to make sure that the body heals properly.

Don't Wimp Out on Buy-In

So when it comes time to heal your company, it is critical that you make sure every employee of every department feels the need for buy-in; otherwise the change will only register with a few key employees and not the entire company.

Now, this can be particularly challenging when one department is both the cause of the roadblock or barrier and also the specific site of the change or healing process. Let's say customer service has been your company sore spot for the last six months.

Well, in order to turn that department around in six months or less, you're going to have to focus on that one department, exclusively, and often to the detriment – at least in your time and energy and focus – of other departments. So why should Human Resources care, or R & D or plant maintenance or even the sales staff?

A blanket statement like, “Well, what's good for customer service is good for the whole company” will only buy you so much goodwill in all those other departments. You need to discover a specific instance as to how the one department you're “healing” will, chain-like, affect each of those other departments and why they should care.

For instance:

- **Human resources should care because...** if they keep hiring lackluster customer service personnel there are going to have to be some changes made in HR hiring practices – and even personnel – as well.
- **Research & Development should care because...** if sales continue falling due to lack of customer service, funding for R & D will naturally suffer.
- **Plant maintenance should care because...** if the customers aren't happy, there may not be a plant to maintain any longer and/or you may need fewer people to maintain it.
- **And the salespeople should absolutely care because...** if they can promise a completely new, revolutionized, state-of-the-art product it could mean more sales down the road.

Sometimes Healing Hurts

It would be nice to simply say, “We’re cured; it’s done!” But healing rarely works that way. Even if you take an antibiotic to wipe out a virus, you still feel pretty cruddy for days after the pills have done their job, and it’s up to you to eat better, move a little more and get your rest until the healing is complete. In other words, healing doesn’t happen; we make it happen.

So don’t be afraid to use bottom line language or even hard line tactics when explaining exactly why change is necessary. After all, you’re not the only person with something at stake here.

Company wide, employees must feel at least some pressure to change if change is to indeed happen. And when every department

knows why the change is necessary but, more importantly, how it will affect them, the healing is not only more effective but more efficient in its processes and procedures.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

The true test of the evolved business leader comes in her or his ability to get company-wide buy-in for healing-necessitated changes. Small company or large, it's a test of management and interpersonal skills; get past this and the road is open to unlimited business success. The secret is in the buy-in.



SUCCEED LIKE THE MEDICIS

“When I write about unlimited success it’s much more than making a million dollars or even a hundred million. I am talking about building an enterprise that can last for generations and grow in many directions because of the solid foundation you built with your company.” — Ainslie Waldron

Sometimes to plan a path to the success we envision, it is helpful to consider the past. These days powerful families and the dynasties they’ve built over the decades are plentiful as examples of how to conduct business in a way that breaks down barriers to success and how to deliver lasting results

Be it the Rockefellers or the Kennedys, the Carnegies or the Trumps, we have ample anecdotes of modern families rising to power and prominence in the 19th and 20th Centuries. But what lessons does one of the most powerful families in history have for us that we might not have learned from these more recent dynasties?

The Medicis were a banking family who rose to prominence in Florence, Italy during the 14th through 16th Centuries. For nearly 200 years the members of the Medici family gained assets, power

and prominence through a series of brilliant, entrepreneurial and famous – some might argue *infamous* – business moves that found even popes, royalty and at one point even the entire Catholic Church in their debt.

So forward-thinking were the Medicis that many historians credit them with the invention of the double-entry bookkeeping system in accounting, patronage of some of the world's most celebrated Renaissance art, the creation of loan interest, the Renaissance itself and even the Italian language! Now that's big success by any measure and this family started with just a small business, like your own.

What's the Big Idea?

The Medicis were lovers of art, literature, science and philosophy; they were great fans of “big” ideas and used their considerable power and influence to fund some of the Renaissance's most celebrated names.

Michelangelo Buonarroti, most often referred to merely as “Michelangelo,” and Leonardo da Vinci were but two of the Medici's most famous discoveries (and who they supported financially for their lifetimes), while none other than Galileo himself used to unveil his latest scientific discoveries at the Court of Medici as parlor entertainment for the family's powerful and influential guests.

As word of the Medici's interest in the arts and science spread throughout the region, artists, poets, philosophers, architects and thinkers in all of the creative endeavors flocked to Florence to find a flourishing culture of creativity and passion, invention

and discovery. Unprecedented in modern history, this period of unsurpassed rebirth and revitalization of the arts and artistry became known as the Renaissance and remains one of the Medicis' more permanent legacies.

In business, however, the Medicis could be ruthless, cruel and downright dangerous. Known as “the entrepreneurs of the Renaissance” or, less charitably, as “the Godfathers of the Renaissance,” they were brilliantly calculated and single-minded in their pursuit of money.

At one point, none other than the entire Catholic church owed them money. What's more, the Medicis invented a system in which they became, essentially, “bill collectors” for the church; parishioners paid them 10% of their earnings and feared ex-communication if they didn't fork over the dough on a regular basis.

Regardless of their strengths or weaknesses, real or perceived, the Medicis have much to offer the modern businessperson facing one or more roadblocks to their success. In this section we will learn more about the Medicis and how they might handle a few of our more common barriers to success.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

So forward-thinking were the Medicis that many historians credit them with the invention of the double-entry bookkeeping system in accounting, patronage of some of the world's most celebrated Renaissance art, the Renaissance itself and even the Italian language! Although the modern business shouldn't emulate some of their more ruthless business tactics, we can learn a lot from a dynasty that made decisions with a 100+ year vision.

WHAT'S THE BIG IDEA? SELL IT

“People are captivated by big ideas; not small ones. Big ideas lead to big results; not because of the size of the ensuing project but rather the support they gather simply because of the audacity of the goal and the synergy that develops around such a project. The very best business leaders can articulate a Big Big vision and sell it. These are great ones of our times and you can be one of them.”

— **Ainslie Waldron**

Like the Medicis, I am a big supporter of big ideas. I suppose that’s because every amazing business success, every winning campaign, every successful launch, every well-executed re-launch, every great product, every exceptional service, every phenomenal idea and every quality invention always comes from a big idea.

Indeed, the success of the world itself has always hinged on this generation or that one’s big ideas. From the discovery of fire to the invention of the wheel and, from Gutenberg’s press to the Declaration of Independence, the big ideas of our predecessors have enabled us to have big ideas of our own.

How important were big ideas to the Medicis? One author has coined the Medicis’ love of big ideas as “The Medici Effect,” or “Where

Business and Innovation Intersect.” As Frans Johansson, author of the book *The Medici Effect* explains “Thanks to this family and a few others like it, sculptors, scientists, poets, philosophers, financiers, painters, and architects converged upon the city of Florence.

There they found each other, learned from one another, and broke down barriers between disciplines. Together they forged a new world based on new ideas—what became known as the Renaissance. As a result, the city became the epicenter of a creative explosion, one of the most innovative eras in history. The effects of the Medici family can be felt even to this day.”

So, what’s YOUR big idea? Would it be something the Medicis might sponsor in 15th Century Florence? Would it be something to unveil as a marvel of science, math, industry, literature, service or invention? Whatever your idea, no matter how large or small, it’s BIG to you and must be sold as BIG not just to your customers, but to your company as well. In your mind, if you’re playing for really really big success, simply ask yourself if the Medici family would stand and applaud a presentation of your idea; if you’re getting the applause – you’ve got the right idea.

Go B.I.G. Or Go Home!

Here are some Medici-like thoughts on how to execute on your B.I.G. idea:

- **Bring out the big guns:** The Medicis were masters of networking, and were connected with anyone who was anyone in Florence, Italy during the 14th through the 16th Centuries. When you go to introduce your big idea, make

sure everyone buys into it; every department head, every supervisor, every corner office, every front-of-the-store employee or behind-the-scene power broker. Remember that having a big idea isn't enough; you have to sell it, too, at all levels of your company.

- **Insist on excellence:** One thing the Medicis insisted upon was excellence; excellence among family members, excellence in accounting, excellence among investors and excellence in those artists and “idea people” they invested in. Big ideas require big commitments from big thinkers, big doers and big personalities. When you build a team to launch your big idea, assign the hardest work to the best and brightest on your team, and expect the best while they work their hardest. You'll be astounded at your people's capacity for excellence; from the dock worker to your chief financial officer I believe everyone has the desire and ability to deliver to this degree.
- **Go for the gold:** The Medicis never did anything small; if they found an artist, explorer or scientist to support, they funded his endeavors for years – occasionally even for life. Getting a Medici to sponsor you wasn't easy, but once they were on your side, the sky was the limit. Just ask Michelangelo, Da Vinci or Galileo. Having a big idea, and even selling it, is only the first step in actually seeing your big idea come to life. For that to happen, you have to commit to it in a big, BIG way.

Big is Relative

I don't want you thinking you have to bet your home every time to bring your big idea to life. In this sense, big is relative; what's

a big deal to you could be small potatoes to someone else, while what's big to somebody else could be something you did twenty years ago!

To each his own, and to every company let them each define BIG on their own terms. The beauty of the Medicis is that they just never stopped; big or small the ideas never ceased to come – and they never ceased to act on them. They held court weekly for centuries just to hear new ideas and meet new people; that's big commitment.

You can participate in the biggest of big ideas; business leaders can emulate the Medicis by constantly thinking, consistently creating, and always doing. If you will stay in motion, stay engaged, stay on top of things and stay in the game you, too, can succeed like the Medicis – no matter your line of work.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

How a business leader might act on the material in this chapter will determine the level of “maximum” in her or his company’s “maximum” potential success. Big ideas get big results; and those with a broader and longer-term definition of “big” have the opportunity at achieving Medici-level success.

PROFIT NOW WHILE BUILDING FOR 50 YEARS

“Advertising rates are plummeting, the costs to bring a product to market are at all-time lows, and many markets are completely underserved. The smart business leaders are making strategic investments here; no matter the short term pain. The geometric mid-term returns on well thought out actions will only be exceeded by the long term Medici-like results.” — Ainslie Waldron

The Medici Family was not only interested in the here and now; they were architects of a far grander vision: power now, power later, power forever. The importance of the Catholic Church cannot be underestimated, either to the Medici story or to Florence, Italy, in the 14th through the 16th Centuries when the Medicis reigned; immortality was far from a given, but it was indeed a certainty for those, like the Medicis, who felt they had God on their side. No matter your system of beliefs, we include this comment to demonstrate the long long term view taken by this uber successful business dynasty.

The idea of impermanence held little value for a family like the Medicis, whose influence is still being studied and felt to this day. They not only had big ideas, but endorsed them through their legendary patronage of the arts. They not only made money,

but devised ingenious ways to count it, grow it, and invest it including for example the aforementioned system of double-entry bookkeeping and the idea of loan interest for the Catholic Church.

Life in the Long-Term

It's doubtful the Medicis were against a little short-term profit now and then, but by all accounts they preferred to reinvest short-term gains for even more powerful long-term revenue streams. Similarly for ourselves, we need to be mindful of how what we do today affects our tomorrows, and how tomorrow affects next month, next week, next year – and five or fifty years hence. Even in the fast changing world of technology I know a company has a great chance of success when I speak with its leaders who at least once in our initial meeting use the phrase “Twenty years from now...” As a matter of fact I often invest primarily based on this seemingly simple strategy.

The idea of profit, short or long term, is a simple one: make more than you spend. We don't need an ancient family, even one of the most powerful, entrepreneurial and by all accounts brilliant like the Medicis to teach us this but it's great to see the results they exemplify. However, many of us see profit as the money we can take from the company now for ourselves or our investors; we're not looking at investing those profits back into the company.

But where is it written that we can't both profit AND build for the next 50 years? One of the biggest barriers in business today is leaders having single-minded vision that says we can only do one thing at a time.

Certainly, the Medicis – and many powerful families, i.e. business throughout the ages – have been single-minded in their

pursuit of success, but there was nothing single-minded about the many varied industries, arts and enthusiasms in which the Medicis dabbled.

In fact, for nearly 300 years they had an interest in just about every profit stream one can imagine, from tithing from the Catholic Church by putting popes into debt to art to architecture. I should mention here I'm not advocating that you hold the mortgage on your local pastor's house or that loan sharking to the Catholic Church are appropriate business actions.

The key point is the importance – as we continue to break down our own barriers to success – that we not get so single-minded in the work of reaping profit that we stop building our companies as well; they're the engines that create our profits and if they're well maintained we can gather profits for generations or at least quite a few years.

Even the Biggest Get Better

Every business needs a profit to survive but, without research, innovation and planning for the next 50 years, what are we surviving for? Do you think Kellogg's is happy with their current roster of cereals?

Sure they are; these are some of the most successful cereals on the planet! But this doesn't mean they're satisfied; the world can't live on Frosted Flakes and Fruit Loops alone; no doubt the folks in R & D at Kellogg's are feverishly working on new cereal tastes, new combinations, new ways to enjoy cereal that don't involve a bowl and milk and it's safe to assume the company's leaders are looking at entirely new businesses that have little to do with cereal.

And Coca-Cola certainly could have made enough money selling those bright red cans all around the world, but why stop there? Their company's unique success has been built on producing add-ons to their original cola empire that include diet versions of their most popular drinks, recipes that appeal to the indigenous peoples in the countries where they are most popular and some of the most consistently creative, fresh and cutting-edge commercials on the planet.

Clearly, if really big success in the long-term is your goal, the decision can't be to build OR profit; profit OR build. These activities must run along parallel tracks and be in perfect synch to achieve business success both now and in the future.

Have a Personal Crystal Ball and Plan Your Own Future

So, what does your future look like? Where will your company be on a far timeline horizon? A great way to plan for the next 50 years is to break that monumental time period down into more bite-size, manageable chunks, i.e. decades. Map out your next 50 years with a strategy that uses the next five decades to focus on different aspects of your business, such as R & D, community involvement, branding, employee development and smart expansion:

- **The First 10 Years:** What if you could give yourself the gift of a decade to create anything you wanted? A decade with high expectations but a low boiling point because this is not the ramp-up phase to your success but the behind-the-scenes plans to build a foundation for how your company will look,

feel and be perceived over – and after – the next 50 years? No matter where you are in your company's life cycle right now, plan over the next 10 years to establish such key vitals as brand identity, unifying vision and corporate personality. Establishing these three “vital elements” will lay the foundation for your success for the next 50 years – and beyond.

- **20 Years to Success:** Where will you be in your company's 20th year? If your plan for the next 10 years goes as planned, your vital signs will be strong and you can work on the next phase of business longevity, which will include your commitment to the local community that has made you so successful. No company succeeds alone, and by building a bridge between your organization and the surrounding community, you pledge in your company's second decade to be not just a good company, but a good citizen. Of course for some companies this will be a global community while for others it's the regional geographic area they will serve.
- **30 Years is the Charm:** Let us plan for your third decade by looking back on your success in business and using that very success to catapult you through the next twenty years. Use the planning for this decade to further cement your past successes by reducing today any needlessly explanatory or uncertain language from your company literature and replacing them with strong, firm, expert language that accentuates what you do best – and have been doing best – for the last twenty years. Everyone likes a company with confidence, and when you look back on the success you've had to date you can look forward to more success in the future. It's a matter of projecting yourself into the future and

looking back to see the smartest things you've done.

- **Fit After 40 Years:** Planning for your company's fourth decade should include considerations toward the 3-E's: **E**xpansion, **E**nergy and **E**mployee development. When is it the right time to **expand** your company? Some would say right away, others might say throughout your journey to success and still others would say whenever it feels right. All of the above answers are appropriate, of course, but which ones are appropriate for *your company*? I contend that if you haven't expanded ten fold by your 40th year, you wasted way too much time. And what of your company's **energy** level? As time goes by, energy often lags; we grow comfortable in our positions, be they at the top or the bottom, so I say if you want to be "Fit After 40 Years," rev up the energy today and just see how successful the next decade can be and enjoy the results for 40 years! Finally, **employee development** must be a vital part of every decade, but particularly after a successful journey through 40 years of profit and peril; the leadership of your company then should be able to look back on the many many people who grew within and contributed to its success and longevity.
- **50 Years Is a Great Horizon:** Celebration is the goal of your 50th year and beyond; celebrating your past success, your employees, your vision, your customers, and your BIG ideas. Use this decade to look back and learn from your mistakes and to look forward to plan for the next 50 years – and beyond. What lies ahead? When you can plan 50 years in advance, the future is very bright indeed!

If you can go through the exercise of projecting yourself, as a company leader, into the future, you will look at your company in an entirely new way. I don't care if you're 82 years old – putting together a 50 year plan for your company will deliver extraordinary results today. This is leadership development at its greatest level and it's the secret for business that enables leaders to deliver greatness.

Never Stop Planning; Never Stop Doing

Finally, remember that growth and profit are not mutually exclusive; one should leapfrog the other on and on into perpetuity. The key is to see growth as profit in and of itself, for even when money is going back into a division or a department, growth is still occurring, thus profit is still developing; it may be through value enhancement or actual cash flow – profit comes in many forms.

There's a good analogy if you look at those times when an actor has been out of the limelight for a few months or, increasingly, a few years and then, suddenly, there he is in one, two, three movies back to back. Where was he? What was he doing? Why was he gone so long?

Obviously, he was working, working hard, putting in unseen hours and untold days to achieve this kind of miraculous recovery. You may have heard it takes 20 years to become an overnight success; it certainly applies here.

No matter what level of success you're achieving, or not, right now, to reach your maximum success over time you must be learning and planning for the very long term. Write "Big Picture" on your daily To Do list and make sure it's one of the first items you check off; the results will pay off for decades.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

The evolved business leader plans for five, ten and fifty years. Plans may change but that's the landscape your vision should cover; big long term plans deliver big long term results.

NETWORKING A LA THE MEDICIS - AMICI DEGLI AMICI (FRIENDS OF FRIENDS)

“When I am asked to judge the real potential of a company I do all the usual business calculations but there is another step- definitely as important as profit/loss, assets, and other factors. I determine the value of the management team’s cumulative personal networks and of the company’s network of suppliers, customers, and marketing partners. Give me five partners, each with a relevant “killer Rolodex” (yes I know I should change the reference to PDA or such but I like the sound of “Rolodex”) a company with a great network of suppliers and I will show you a company that has nearly unlimited potential.”— Ainslie Waldron

Part of the Medici’s success was that everyone in Florence, Italy and for that matter well beyond the geographic shores of this empire, wanted to be associated with this family dynasty. Everyone wanted to please the Medicis, to do favors for them, to receive favors from them, and as such the most powerful family of the Renaissance had almost unlimited access to business, government and churches alike. Remember as we’re talking about

churches, we're not talking about the neighborhood place of worship like we have today but rather some of the most powerful political and financial forces of that time.

These “friends of friends,” as they were known (*amici degli amici*), gave the Medicis power to the nth degree, and they used it wisely and strategically. It was almost as if they had a special gene for networking skills and they were impressive even by today's social media standards.

Our modern interpretation of networking is decidedly different. Today, of course, we network to spread the word, to encourage our cause, to drum up business, to do or request favors. In the times of the powerful Medici family, networking *was* their business. Their intensely loyal network didn't just spread the word, they did the work.

If an official's palm needed to be greased, it got greased; if a permit needed to be gained, it was gained. If paints, plaster or marble needed to be ordered from the edges of the known earth, it got ordered; if an out-of-town artist needed a place to sleep, a spot of lunch or a tailored pair of pants, he got one, both, or all of the above. Rarely did the Medicis need to trouble themselves with the small details of their various business affairs because their network of friends of friends did most of the work for them.

3 Ways to Network Like the Medicis

If we are to look to the Medicis for business wisdom, we must likewise revisit our own modern idea of networking and, if necessary, retool it as well if we're to use this tool for maximum business success. Here are three ways to network like the Medicis and create unparalleled business success for you and your company:

- 1. Recruit with an eye for friends and family:** It was common for the Medicis to woo one party when, all along, they were seeking that party's connection to a banker, artist, philosopher or poet of interest. We, too, should be mindful of not just who we are hiring but what extracurricular "friends and family," as the popular cell phone jargon goes, he or she brings to the picture. For instance, when we hire the young, technically proficient and networking-conscious, we are not just employing them but their access to knowledge and influence in the youth community. Consider the collateral ramifications for marketing, R & D and other important areas so critical to success as you make hiring decisions. You're hiring a person but every person comes with a network.
- 2. Collaboration is key:** We are first part of a community and businesspeople second; we do not exist on an island unto ourselves and everything from county tax incentives to the local caterer for our corporate cookout remind us daily that we don't just co-exist within our communities but that we collaborate with them as well. Encourage your employees to get involved in community activities; encourage them to wear your corporate logo when they do so. Sponsor local activities and get involved at the local level by partnering with schools and other local businesses to enhance not just your corporate reputation but your collaborative capabilities as well. You've learned in this book that not all business success can be measured by short-term Profit and Loss statements; collaboration within your community and with other businesses

establishes both credibility and loyalty that can only be measured in the long-term.

- 3. Embrace technology on a micro level:** Myspace, Facebook, Twitter, et al, all show us that technology has the power to connect us with the world in ways never before imagined. Consider how Barack Obama's campaign push to reach out to young voters using messages they could understand delivered via platforms they felt comfortable with, i.e. texting, online petitions and "word of mouse" helped make him the younger generation's candidate of choice. It is imperative that not just your IT department but also every member of your marketing and business development teams be cognizant of the right networking opportunities for you and to utilize them, when appropriate, to increase your company's capabilities of collaboration.

The World's Oldest Profession?

It should be heartening to know that networking is one of the world's oldest professions. That means anything goes, that technology isn't necessary, that reaching out to others is instinctual and that, in the end, business always has been – and always will be – about reaching out to others.

Don't be intimidated by the Medicis' level of success; rather, let it inspire you instead! Realize that no matter who you are, or how big – or small – your company, you can make networking work for you, just like the Medicis.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

The Medicis were among the first, and certainly the most successful, to realize the value of personal and business networks. They were plugged in everywhere; people sought favors and leapt at the opportunity to do something for any Medici. There's an analogous opportunity out there today – particularly in the field of social networking. Anyone can now have a big network and the quality of that network can enable you to catapult to extreme business success; quickly. Networking like the Medicis is a secret for business success.

LESSONS FROM THE MEDICIS: CENTURIES ON THE GLOBAL 100 LIST

“Generational thinking, effectively 20 and 50 and 100 year planning, is so rare among companies today that it can and should be what makes your company unique. If I’m a supplier to a company with a 50 year plan I’m going to do everything possible to help that company; if I’m a customer – same thing. Have a 20 year plan and more: it’s a secret for business.” — Ainslie Waldron

It has been said that many wealthy families go from “shirtsleeves to shirtsleeves” in less than three generations. In other words, the “wealth creator” builds a successful business from the ground up, rolling up his sleeves and getting to work to provide for himself and his family.

When the original wealth creator dies, he passes on his dynasty to G2, or the second generation. Occasionally they work hard or smart enough to keep the dynasty going, at least until the third generation, or G3. However, this generation rarely has the work ethic required to keep a well-oiled business running; they simply haven’t the tools or experience because they’ve always known money and never had to work for it. As a result, the once-prosperous family business often crumbles to ruins once it’s in the

hands of G3, going back to “shirtsleeves” from its once prominent position. This entire process typically takes less than a century to go from rags to riches and back to rags.

So how, then, did one family rise to prominence and gain – then keep – control in Florence, Italy for nearly 300 years? What was their secret difference? How did they single-handedly create a Renaissance like none the world had ever seen? How did they spot, nurture and claim the talent of some of this planet’s most brilliant and talented artists and architects? More importantly, what can we take away from this alternately creative and cruel Italian mega-family?

The Original Entrepreneurs

At their essential core, the Medicis were entrepreneurs of the highest order, visionary thinkers without limits or borders, devotees of “the big ideas” of their time, purists above all and ruthless in their business pursuits. In these five critical areas alone we have much to learn from the Medici Family to this day:

1. **Embrace Your Inner Entrepreneur:** Everyone who ever started a lemonade stand as a child, a software company as a young adult, or created a global manufacturing firm later in life has something important in common with every business person everywhere. They have within themselves the desire to muster resources to create an entrepreneurial venture; it’s intuitive, it’s too strong a motivation to ignore. It’s that feeling you have the day your new office opens or that first shipment of finished inventory arrives at your

garage; it's the differentiator between us and everyone else in the world. That is what the inner entrepreneur is all about. Seemingly three centuries of Medicis were born with this differentiator and it ultimately defined them as a family. What's the tie between that dynasty and the local print shop owner in San Antonio? Like the Medicis the small business owner answered the call that came from deep within themselves. *The Ultimate Secret for Business* is all about listening to this call and taking action; embracing your inner entrepreneur.

- 2. Visions Without Borders:** To dominate like the Medicis (and for hopefully just as long as the Medicis did), you must not just think BIG but then think even BIGGER to a whole new level. When your vision hits a border, obstacle or horizon, step back and use your Medici-like vision to look past the border or the horizon to find something even bigger, bolder and better beyond. Don't just package your garden tools together, give them a name, revise your packaging, come up with a catchy slogan, offer something free when you buy them as a set, do a total re-launch, etc. Don't just think, "We're doing fine; let's not fix what isn't broken." Instead, to succeed like the Medicis you must see "What's the Next Big Thing?" in your world. That is what you should focus on and it's what will take you beyond the horizon to maximum business success.
- 3. Take Action on Your Big Idea:** Remember that the Medicis weren't big on talking; they were absolutely fanatic about doing. Their MO was not to be big and flashy and hold seats of power, but to own and control those who were already in

power so they could stay in the background, collecting the profits and pulling the strings from well behind the scenes. If we are to learn anything from the Medicis it is that you must be firmly committed to every idea, big or small, and see it through to action so that you can reap the benefits, now and in the long-term.

4. Be Fanatical About Your Success: No, we're not talking about being obsessive about your success; that would hold you back. Instead you must be **purely** fanatical about commercial triumph. Once you decide on your goal you will need to focus like a laser to achieve it single-mindedly, with clarity of vision and purity of purpose. This concept removes limits from your venture. As we have learned, the Medicis were single-minded about every pursuit they had, and they had many; dozens upon dozens, in fact. You can be single-minded about multiple pursuits, so long as your maddening pursuit of each remains purely driven based on laser-like focus.

5. Ruthlessness Isn't Always a Bad Thing: These days we assume if you're being ruthless you're taking personal shots at others or inappropriately cutting the legs out from your competition, but you don't have to do others harm to do yourself some good in the success department. Ruthless doesn't have to be a bad word and it can drive some positive action. For instance, you can be ruthlessly efficient, ruthlessly charitable, ruthlessly collaborative, ruthlessly community conscious, ruthlessly strategic, a ruthless negotiator, a ruthless planner and even ruthlessly **fill in the blank with what YOU would like to be ruthless about.**

Where is it written that to be ruthless we must hurt others?
In fact, being ruthless can be one of the best ways to achieve
maximum business success!

THE SECRET SUMMARY

The best business leaders acknowledge their inner entrepreneur; that voice that led them to open their first office, launch their first product, or hire their first employees. Thereafter they have the ability to focus like a laser on their goal which leads them to maximum efficiency and ultimately unprecedented business success. It worked for the Medicis and it will work for you – that's a secret of evolved business owners.

PART

FIVE



TAKE THIS BOOK... AND RUN WITH IT - NOW!

“The ultimate success element, and it’s not a secret, is Action. There is so much mind-candy business information out there describing great leadership concepts, wealth building advice, the laws of attraction and similar ideas that it’s easy to get diverted from the real key to success. Any business information, or life strategy ideas for that matter, that do not call for specific and continuing action, in my opinion are a waste of your time. If your business plan doesn’t clearly set out what action you’re taking tomorrow and the day after that; it’s of little value. Taking action, on a planned timeline that includes something you’re going to do in the next 24 hours is a secret for business.” — Ainslie Waldron

NOW!

Now is the time for change, for acceptance, for courage, for dedication, for enthusiasm, for energy, for growth, for risk, for wisdom and most importantly Action... for success! Why now? Because, as we all know, tomorrow is never promised to us and later is too late.

You know how every year you grab that new diet book and resolve to lose weight and then... what? You lose a few pounds after a week or two of starving yourself on grapefruits or kiwi or strawberries and then, wow, that roast looks good and boom; the weight comes back on – and then some.

You know how every weekend you rush out, buy twelve buckets of paint, some rollers, some bins, some tarps and rush home and... what? Something on TV catches your eye while you're unpacking the bags and, well, that's that; best leave it to next weekend.

It is human nature to get distracted, to lose interest, to fade away, to give up; to a certain extent, indifference is hardwired into our collective DNA. How else do you explain for dozens of new diet books every year or garages full of unopened paint cans and neatly-folded tarps?

When the movie *Top Gun* starring Tom Cruise and Val Kilmer came out in movie theaters, recruiters for the US Navy set up recruiter booths right in the theater to capitalize on moviegoers' enthusiasm for the military as they were leaving the theater.

Why not just hand out pamphlets to exiting patrons? Simple: human nature is such that those recruiters knew the adrenaline and testosterone and enthusiasm of the movie would have worn off by the time the moviegoers got to the recruiting stations. So, get 'em while they're hot!

Don't Let the Dust Settle on Change!

Don't let *The Ultimate Secret for Business* just be another dusty book among all your other dusty books on your business bookshelf. For this to be something better than all those other business books you've read in your career, you absolutely have to take some action

now. Not tomorrow, not the next day, not next week or for heaven's sake not next year.

NOW!

Even if the action is to just draw up some plans, that's more than you did yesterday. Think of what might have happened if you'd drawn up those plans last month, last year, or five years ago. Think of where you'd be if you started what you're doing now way back then; now fast forward and think how grateful you'll be next year that you drew up these plans today!

Even if the action is to set a date for a new launch, that's more than you did last week. This means you have a date to anticipate, something firm and reportable to publish in your company newsletter or merely in a memo to the staff; it's a solid achievement and more than you did on behalf of that new launch yesterday!

Even if the action is to set up a "town hall" meeting to declare your plans to the company, that's more than you did last month. After all, look at how you'll spread the news of change, look at how many people you'll inspire and, better still, look at how many additional people you'll have now to hold you accountable to change!

But don't stop there. What can you do next? How many more employees can you motivate? What else can you do to publicize that new launch? Who else can you tell about your new ideas, your renewed growth?

Whatever you do, keep moving; momentum is absolutely the key to change and continuous positive change is absolutely the key to success. And the best part is, as I've shared with you over and over again throughout this book, it's not the BIG decisions that make the most difference but the little things you do every single day that produce great change.

We've all seen big, grand, elaborate schemes go south because of bad planning, too few resources or simply lack of motivation after the confetti falls, the band quits playing and the dust settles. Big ideas and even bigger successes are built on the backs of small, tiny, nearly infinitesimal changes and actions that permeate every department of truly successful companies. It's really a combination of forward movement and fine tuning once you've removed roadblocks and implemented positive changes.

So it's not the mission statements and the blueprints and the wall charts that work so much as the flex schedules, that one day everyone chooses to telecommute to save office expenses, the extra employee effort on nights and weekends, the half-hour overtime everyone puts in each week or simply everyone doing what he or she is supposed to do every day that really do work wonders. And that's great news because you don't have to move mountains to guide your company to unprecedented success; you just have to start moving... NOW!

Go Now, and Grow Now

This final section of *The Ultimate Secret for Business* is all about the now; **deciding now**, **acting now**, **starting now**, **changing now**... **succeeding now**. Why is Now so important? Because there's never been a better time to make the changes you need to make – and make them for good.

Before you read this book you had an inkling that maybe, something might be keeping your business from reaching its maximum potential; now you should be able to identify exactly what's wrong and, what's more, you know how to fix it.

So fix it; now.

Change it; now.

Grow the company; now.

Succeed beyond your dreams; now.

If I'm starting to sound too focused on immediate action, consider your alternatives. You don't change now, you put it off until tomorrow, something else comes up, you put it off until the next day, your district manager quits, a shipment is late, your assistant calls in sick, pretty soon it's next week, then next month, then next year and you haven't changed at all; haven't grown, haven't knocked down any of those roadblocks, haven't found a way around any of those barriers to your success and you're not only right back where you started before you picked up *The Ultimate Secret for Business* but you're two lengths back because those obstacles you never got rid of have literally stalled your path to success. Forgive this business rant but it is the script so many business owners have unconsciously written for themselves. There's always an excuse for failure but in my opinion there is a much stronger reason to succeed.

I've seen the above scenario happen, or something quite similar, at too many companies, too many times to not jump on my soapbox and caution every business owner. Don't let this scenario happen to you; do the opposite from what most other business leaders are doing and act now to prevent procrastination, put out brush fires, meet deadlines, establish processes, set schedules and eliminate those very road blocks you've sworn to knock down or break through.

There are moments in our lives when the clouds break, the sun peeks through, the rain stops and – just for a second or two – we

can see both the forest AND the trees; we can see what's holding us back AND an ideal path to get where we want to go. Don't wait for the clouds to reform, for the deluge to start pouring again and for the forest (the future) to shrink back into the distance. "Now" should be your watchword.

Congratulations Are In Order!

Use the wisdom you've gained throughout our time together – about your company, about your road blocks to success, about yourself – to realize what's gotten you where you are and what needs to be done to get where you want to go.

You've taken action by investing the time to read this volume; congratulations on that accomplishment! There are still lessons to be learned from *The Ultimate Secret for Business* to put you even farther along toward the finish line than you'd ever imagined you could get and this should be your next step. Use them; now.

Here is a golden opportunity to capitalize on the investment of time, energy, memory and self-understanding you've made while reading this book. To waste it would be a tragedy; to use it will mean an unlimited return on your investment.

But the secret for business is valuable only if you use it; and use it NOW!

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Now is the time for change, for acceptance, for courage, for dedication, for enthusiasm, for energy, for growth, for risk, for wisdom... for success! Why now? Because, as we all know, tomorrow is never promised to us and later is too late.

DECIDE NOW

“Most businesses fall into a rut when it comes to suppliers and vendors. If you have all the same suppliers from last year and no new ones, chances are your business is missing out on new products or services that your customers or clients could benefit from. In challenging times the business owner who seeks out additional supplier relationships will be rewarded with new products, low prices, joint marketing and other benefits.” — Ainslie Waldron

The world is full of good *intentions* while the winner’s circle is full of good *decisions*. I can tell you right now, with 100% accuracy, that no matter what fears you have, no matter how many roadblocks you face, no matter what the size of your company, the only thing standing between you and success at this very moment is one thing: the decision to succeed.

Yes, it will take time; sure, it will cost money. Certainly, there will be change; of course there will be challenges. However, this is true of business regardless of whether you choose to succeed or not.

Is your business free of **time** constraints right now?

Can you run your current business for **free**?

Isn’t **change** a part of your daily existence anyway?

Aren’t **challenges** the main reason you picked up this book?

The fact is, it is as costly, time-consuming, risky and challenging

to stay exactly where you are as it is to decide to change – now – and actually do something about your roadblocks to success.

You're Only As Strong As Your First Link

I know; making a decision can be life-altering for business big and small. It's a little like steering the Titanic; even small companies can't just stop or turn on a dime. Change, progress and success take time and the decisions you make now, right now, today, affect not only your future but the future of everyone who works for you. The good news is that you know what you need to do; you simply have to decide when to do it. The even better news is that I've decided that date for you: NOW!

Decisions are like chains; you make one decision and it leads to the next and the next and the next until at last you have a strong series of "links" (decisions) that all work together to help foster, enable and, finally, achieve success.

But every chain starts with the first link, and you must decide now if you are to capitalize on the wisdom, knowledge and motivation that lie at the heart of reading *The Ultimate Secret for Business*.

The 6 Gifts of Deciding Decisively

To chip away at the fear and intimidation that lurk around the decision-making process, allow me to share with you the **6 Gifts of Deciding Decisively**:

- **Gift # 1 – Speed:** When you don't know where you're going, you move cautiously for fear of taking the wrong turn or

going too far in the wrong direction. When you decide decisively which way you want to go and just how to get there, that hesitancy is gone and you can move quickly and efficiently in the direction of purpose and power.

- **Gift # 2 – Agility:** Think of the many days you've spent befuddled by doubt and boxed in with fear; doubt of the future and fear of the future. When you decide, decisively, to change, to grow, to re-launch or restructure or just plain renew, the doubt and fear don't exactly disappear but they definitely get brushed aside by the energy, momentum and direction of your decisive decision. With these twin obstacles out of the way, you are free to move with decisiveness and agility toward success.
- **Gift # 3 – Freedom:** When you finally decide to change, a sense of freedom accompanies your every moment. You are free from the past, free from the anxiety of having to make the decision itself and just plain free from worrying about having to decide in the first place. This freedom allows you to move forward unencumbered by anxiety, fear and doubt.
- **Gift # 4 – Focus:** Clarity is the gift of night goggles in the dark or brand new windshield wipers in the rain. When we make decisive decisions it gives us the focus that we lacked before the decision was made; this gives us a clear advantage over our competition because now not only can we see our destination but we can see it clearly and focus on it exclusively. Meanwhile, everyone else is fumbling around in the dark.
- **Gift # 5 – Teamwork:** When you make a decision, promptly, decisively, you have a date, a dream, and a common goal to

work toward. In every race there are two points: a starting line and a finish line. We all know where to start, it's the finish line that gets hazier and hazier as we wander around, lost in the dark. Decisive decisions give you and your team a clear finish line to race toward; not alone, but together.

- **Gift # 6 – Destination:** In short, every decision is also a destination; you are essentially deciding to do something, which leads you to achieve something, which leads you to get somewhere.

Change Is Coming, Whether We Like it Or Not

As you can see, making decisions is never easy but it is no more difficult than deciding simply to stand still and do nothing. Change is coming, whether we like it or not. Success is out there waiting, whether you take advantage of it or not. All that's left for you to do now is simply decide.

How? Decisively.

Where? Right where you are.

Who? You, your department heads and every employee in the company.

Why? Because you can't succeed without deciding to succeed.

When? NOW!

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Decisions are like chains; you make one decision and it leads to the next and the next and the next until at last you have a strong series of “links” (decisions) that all work together to help foster, enable and, finally, achieve success.

ACT NOW

“In every market there are opportunities, and particularly in this market there are some great opportunities arising. Many people are giving up business, particularly in this climate at the moment. It is a great opportunity, a great time to look for new customers. Many competitors are putting off their sales staff. There are a lot of potential customers out there for new businesses and for businesses that are seeking to expand because the majority of businesses are doing the opposite and that leaves an opening, an opportunity, for many businesses to get in there and find those customers.”

— Ainslie Waldron

While my library is full of the greatest minds this world has to offer, I admit to a guilty pleasure for action movies! The more action-y, the cheesier, the more predictable, the more fake blood and loud explosions, the better! And, amazingly, from time to time the dialogue in these B-List, straight-to-video action films contain pearls of wisdom that capture exactly what I am thinking at certain moments in time.

Case in point: I was watching an action movie not long ago where a rogue federal agent had to transport a witness to court under the harshest of conditions; no backup, no guns, no cell phones, no car, not even a partner (his had been killed during a bank hold up in the film’s first act, but that’s a whole other story).

Even worse, his charge – a spoiled mobster widow who simply would NOT shut UP – was a hostile witness at best and a horrible traveling partner at worst. Just when the bad guys were getting ready to leave without finding them, she would sneeze and alert twelve lurking bad men with automatic weapons to their presence just over there in the bushes. Just when the good guy had gotten them out of another life or death situation, she'd break a nail or a high heel and send them toppling down a hill straight into the arms of, that's right, yet more bad guys with plenty of guns and unlimited ammunition.

At any rate, at one point amidst another flurry of multiple flying bullets and exploding grenades in the grungy basement of a deserted warehouse with the bad guys closing in, the hero of our action movie was explaining to his traveling companion why words were cheap.

“You are what you do,” he said sternly, gritting his steel jaws as he reloaded his weapon for the umpteenth time and prepared to fight off yet another un-fight-off-able assault. “Everything else is just talk.”

**“You Are What You Do.
Everything Else Is Just Talk.”**

Indeed! If you could have seen me leap up off the couch and celebrate his momentous words of wisdom you would have thought I was auditioning for the role of stunt woman in his next action film!

If I could sum up the very heart of *The Ultimate Secret for Business* in 10 words or less, it would be this unforgettable quote

from an otherwise very forgettable action movie: “You are what you do. Everything else is just talk.”

We can talk all day about what it is you need to do but, unless you actually grit your teeth and get down to the business of doing it, at the end of the day it really IS just talk; nothing gets done until something gets started.

The difference between talking and doing, of course, is acting; and not the kind of “acting” – if you can call it that – the characters in my action movie were doing. I’m talking about sincere and directed, focused and specific action in the direction of change.

Action is both the simplest of motions and yet the most challenging movement you will ever accomplish. Why? Because we’re so used to talking, we’re so used to conference calls and memos and planning sessions and brainstorming sessions and breakfast meetings and business lunches that very little, if anything, ever gets done while thousands and thousands of words and mission statements and declarations and agendas are utilized to do, essentially, nothing.

“You are what you do. Everything else is just talk.”

What you do, right now, at this point in your company’s existence will determine who you are; as a visionary, as a boss, as an employee, as a department head, as a man or a woman – as a leader.

Action Lists

On a very practical basis, generating a “to do” list on a daily basis can be a very simple yet an amazingly effective tool. There are some very clear do’s and don’ts about “to do” lists. As with everything,

they have pitfalls as well as benefits.

It is worth taking a few minutes to ensure that your “to do” list is prioritized in terms of importance and only YOU can determine that. I have seen many business leaders handed daily “to do” lists – sometimes of course these have much fancier titles than “to do” lists – by their Personal Assistants. The PA has prioritized the list for his boss. This prioritization must always be reviewed by you. Generally PAs will prioritize tasks in terms of timelines – the nearest timeline requires the most urgent attention. You know that this is not always the case. Your priorities are in terms of importance of the task to your business and your business development and success. Sometimes something that has a deadline of today can in fact be pushed out to tomorrow or the day after while returning a call that was deemed of lesser importance by your PA is actually the most important task of the day and crucial to your winning a major contract. Only you can determine the prioritization of the “to do” list. The most important thing is that you ensure that you do prioritize it. You should also add to any list provided to you as you will undoubtedly have additional tasks which your PA is not yet aware of.

The benefits are manifold and tomorrow when you review the list and add to it you can clearly see the progress you have made.

Prioritized lists help you focus on what is important in your business.

You will probably find that some tasks stay permanently at the bottom of the list. This is OK. It means that you have determined that they are of very low priority. In fact maybe they should not be done at all. It is amazing how some of the tasks at the bottom of the lists just disappear over time. This is a phenomenon that most

leaders who prioritize their daily lists seem to relate to.

Prioritized lists are great ways of ensuring that we put maximum effort into what matters most. They can also assist us in determining what tasks can be delegated and to whom, and which tasks are of high priority and must be done by you.

Most of all – lists help us to take immediate ACTION which is what is so important in achieving business success.

Action = Results

When you act, you don't just move forward.

When you act, you:

- Take control
- Take charge
- Take initiative
- Take the helm
- Make a statement
- Make success happen
- Make a change
- Make a whole new reality
- Issue a challenge
- Lead from your heart
- Lead with direction
- Lead by example
- Lead, period...

So remember, action isn't just **what you do**; it's **who you are**.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Action is both the simplest of motions and yet the most challenging movement you will ever accomplish. Why? Because we are so used to talking, we are so used to conference calls and memos and planning sessions and brainstorming sessions and breakfast meetings and business lunches that very little, if anything, ever gets done while thousands and thousands of words and mission statements and declarations and agendas are utilized to do, essentially, nothing.

START NOW

“People are seeing businesses decline, people are seeing things dissipate and disappear and they are just looking for new ventures, and I think it is probably a great time, a great opportunistic time to launch something new. That idea that you’ve had but you’ve been waiting for the right time, why not choose now as the right time? Make a plan, test it out now. You might be surprised at the results.”

— Ainslie Waldron

There is a great feeling of relief when you start something new. Think about the last trip you took. All the planning, the deciding where to go, when to go, finagling the time off, planning the sights and sounds and diversions you’d enjoy, buying that new bikini or snorkel, packing it all up, the restless night before the big day of your departure, the ride to the airport, the anxiety of boarding the plane, the moment of liftoff and the vague sense of relief that, finally, at last, you were **on your way**.

Where are you going? Where are you headed? How long have you been planning for this day, this moment in time? What adventures, side trips, rest stops and undiscovered country awaits?

You will never know if you don’t take a deep breath and just... get... started.

Get a Head S.T.A.R.T. On Success

Don't know where, how, why or when? Here, let me give you a head S.T.A.R.T.:

- **Satisfaction:** The satisfaction of beginning a journey is often worth all the anxiety, fear, doubt and hesitation that led up to it. Starting now will give you that sense of satisfaction sooner but, the good news is, it doesn't fade over time. Every step of the way, every milestone of progress, every bit of good – even bad – news to report means that starting was well worth the effort and there's nothing more satisfying than knowing you're on the right road for the right reasons.
- **Transformation:** You picked this book up because you had stumbling blocks, obstacles and barriers to your success; to eradicate, blow through and flat-out eliminate these road blocks a change is needed. Starting to change is the first step in your transformation from frustration to success.
- **Attitude:** Success requires a positive attitude, an attitude of belief, hope, trust and faith in your abilities and, above all else, an attitude of perseverance. All of these attitudes are on hold until you nod your head, roll up your sleeves and get started with the very necessary process of eradicating obstacles to your own success.
- **Responsibility:** Leadership carries with it the heavy mantle of responsibility; responsibility for your actions, for your company, for your employees, for your customers and for your family. This weight of responsibility can often mean the difference between starting and hesitating; success and

failure. With so many people depending on you, with so much riding on your success, you owe it to yourself and all these other people to get started today – right now – on eradicating those barriers so that you can all share in the incomparable feeling of success.

- **Timeliness:** I have said it before and I will say it again, there has never been a better time to change than right now at this very moment. To prevent the economy from taking you under, you must change. To deal with the after shocks of a broken economy, you must grow. To prepare for the inevitable rebound to follow this ravaged economy, you must start now to prepare for your eventual success. Whether you're changing to keep up, growing to stay in business or starting now in order to reap the rewards later, the common denominator is time; change, grow and start now to succeed on your own terms, in your own time.

Starting Is Its Own Reward

Over and above all the talk, the reasons why, the results of and the inspiration in simply starting, starting really IS its own reward. To “start” is an action; the very word implies movement, energy, vitality and sincerity.

Think of how many times you've wanted to get started, thought about getting started, worried over starting, set yourself a start date and then.... kaput. Nothing happened. Now you have the tools not just to start, but to follow through. And with all that behind you, starting isn't just going to be easier – this time, it's going to last.

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Where are you going? Where are you headed? How long have you been planning for this day, this moment in time? What adventures, side trips, rest stops and undiscovered country awaits? You will never know if you don't take a deep breath and just... get... started.

CHANGE NOW

“From decades of studying this I can often identify the exact spot where the unconscious mind of the business owner or manager has created a barrier to success. They don’t know it’s there and the results of getting past it can be amazing.” — Ainslie Waldron

Change can be scary; this much we both know by now. When we change, even when we just *think* about changing, we risk the one thing that has become more important to us than success: **comfort**. And yet the more comfortable we grow in our success, even in our lack of success, the more comfortable we grow, period.

If change is the sound of progress, then comfort is the soundtrack of similarity. While many of us seek the comfort of, well, comfort, for those of us seeking success comfort is best viewed in our rearview mirrors!

Or, as John Maxwell, author of dozens of books on leadership including *The Difference Maker* and *Make Today Count* puts it, “If we’re growing, we’re always going to be out of our comfort zone.” We often confuse comfort with happiness, with satisfaction, with progress, even with success.

“How do we know when we’re successful?” we are often asked.

“When we’re comfortable,” we just as often answer.

But what happens when we get comfortable? With our new product line, with our latest advertising campaign, with the numbers for our third quarter or the tone of our annual shareholders report? That's right; we lay back, we slack off, we assume all is right with the world.

Even worse, when we get comfortable we ignore those various roadblocks and barriers to success; we deny what is right in front of our eyes, be it the rude receptionist or the wrong person in a mission-critical role because it means changing things will make us uncomfortable. Change may be uncomfortable, but it doesn't have to be unpleasant.

What Change Can Do for You

What can change do for you? Change can...

- Cause growth
- Incite passion
- Capture inspiration
- Move mountains
- Increase employee morale
- Ensure customer loyalty
- Give the newspapers and trade journals something to write about
- Give departments new direction
- Recapture excitement

In short, change is not to be feared but embraced; change shouldn't be avoided but eagerly sought after. The shift from comfort to

change doesn't need to be abrupt, sudden or, for that matter, all that uncomfortable. In fact, it can be as easy as replacing the warm feelings you get when you consider comfort with the excitement, vigor and possible – real, potential opportunity – of change.

This can take time, so give yourself time but don't delay; start today!

THE SECRET SUMMARY

Change can be scary; this much we both know by now. When we change, even when we just think about changing, we risk the one thing that has become more important to us than success: comfort. And yet the more comfortable we grow in our success, even in our lack of success, the more comfortable we grow, period. Comfort can equal stagnation.

SUCCEED NOW

“Your business isn’t there to make other businesses float; your business is there to sail on its own.” — Ainslie Waldron

Success has become such a goal, such a destination, such a finish line that we often feel we’ll never achieve it, after all. Nonsense! Success happens to people every day; people dumber, slower, lazier and less creative than you!

How do they do it? Simple; they roll up their sleeves, stop thinking so hard and just get... down... to... business. Okay, so it’s not EXACTLY that simple but this is the recipe for success that so many people have followed throughout the ages.

We have spent an entire book carefully thinking, recording, responding, reacting, deciding, deciphering, analyzing and re-analyzing what has been holding you back from success. Now you know; now we both know what it is you’ve been doing wrong or, if not exactly wrong, then not quite right enough.

Success is Only One Decision Away

The time for thinking is over; the time for doing – for succeeding – is NOW!

Here's how:

- **Be prepared:** Yes, change is challenging and obstacles aren't easy to eradicate – nor do they come down over night. Plans will change, deadlines will come and go without (always) being met, employee morale will dip and rise, and even you may be disappointed from time to time. It's okay, it's natural, but it's not okay to give up once you've started on this journey so promising. The best way to overcome disappointment is to prepare for it – and then push through it. What's that the Boy Scouts say? "Be prepared." When you are prepared, it makes change much easier to swallow, disappointment much easier to bear and success much, much more likely.
- **Don't waver in your confidence:** Once on course, stay committed to the course. The only thing worse than having obstacles in the way of your success is pledging to eliminate those obstacles and then, just when true change is about to happen, just when it's darkest before the coming dawn, you waver in your confidence and throw out all the progress that's been made by caving in to fear, pressure, anxiety or all of the above. It's natural to blink at the first signs of push back or confusion, but don't close your eyes completely; just open them back up and see the bright future ahead!
- **Ensure employee buy-in with leader enthusiasm:** Committing to change means you must lead by example; lead your employees, lead your managers, lead your department heads, lead your investors and your customers and your marketing staff and your executive board. Whatever your position, you must become the honorary "change agent" and

with that responsibility comes the additional goal of making sure your employees' enthusiasm matches your own.

- **Chart your progress:** We all need to see results, even if they're only measured in millimeters! More importantly, how will you know how far you've come if you don't mark where you began? Progress can be measured in a variety of ways; in pure profit, in units sold, in dollars saved versus dollars spent, in employee retention, in new hires, heck, in employee morale! The important thing is not how you chart your progress but that you chart it at all.
- **Publish every success:** Finally, don't be shy about your success. Much as comfort breeds comfort and change breeds change, success breeds success. You know how when you're on a diet and you've hit that plateau and there's no change; you're not dropping any clothes sizes and the scale's not moving any and people have stopped remarking on how much weight you've lost? That's what happens when you have success but don't publish it: your team, your department, your people need to know that all the extra effort, enthusiasm and energy they've been pumping into their jobs are paying off. Published progress reports, even if it's just a flow chart in the break room or a few paragraphs – and a catchy title! – in the employee newsletter, are what they need to succeed.

Try a Little, Succeed a Lot

Remember, in the final analysis, success is not about the BIG idea or the HUGE agenda or even the BRILLIANT master plan; it's

about those little changes, those little signs of progress, those baby steps that happen in every department, every day.

Don't keep your success a secret; share it and more success will follow!

THE SECRET SUMMARY

We have spent an entire book carefully thinking, recording, responding, reacting, deciding, deciphering, analyzing and re-analyzing what has been holding you back from success. Now you know; now we both know what it is you've been doing wrong or, if not exactly wrong, then not quite right enough. The time for thinking is over; the time for doing – for succeeding – is NOW!

YOUR TAKE AWAY - THE ULTIMATE SECRET FOR BUSINESS

“If time is our most valuable resource, why wait years striving for business success when you can achieve it in six months or less?”

— Ainslie Waldron

Do you get annoyed because the microwave takes too long to cook? Are you tapping your fingers in impatience because the fax is only printing out a document from Kenya at the rate of eight pages per minute and your Kenyan associates didn't have a scanner for a quick email? Is instant messaging not quite fast enough for you? Does your assistant frequently accuse you of “hovering” to somehow speed up his work with the sheer force of your presence? Are you smiling as you see yourself in some or all of these scenarios and realize just how amusing they are? Well then this chapter is for you.

Two common characteristics I've found among great business leaders are this very sense of impatience, regardless of the velocity of their activities, and an ability to laugh at the outrageous demands they make on themselves and others as they pursue that

thing we call business success. It's this amused impatience I hope to serve with this chapter.

I was shocked last month when my publisher told me that more than 70% of readers of business books read only the first two and the very last chapters. This isn't something you want to hear after putting in scores of late nights to get just the right tone, content and presentation for a book that will show any business leader how to quickly achieve maximum business success. However, I'm certainly a realist and it occurs to me that I'm also sometimes guilty of heading for the final chapter of an intriguing business book.

So it's for you, the successful business leader looking with impatience for the essence of the book, that I'm writing this chapter to summarize several key points. I hope you'll be enticed to read the rest of the volume but I'll work with the time allotment you're prepared to give.

What follows is *The Ultimate Secret for Business – Executive Summary*. These are accelerated business strategies to enable a business leader to take her company to its maximum success in six months or less.

The Strategy

If you're in business, you are a member of a community of dreamers; someone who enjoys gathering and using resources for the best possible commercial outcome. At the start of every new management posting or on the very day you establish your new business; you have an inner feeling of unlimited horizons; that your new business effort has the potential to certainly change your life and quite possibly the world. It's not the ribbon cutting

or the Welcome New Guy luncheon that gives you the thrill; it goes much deeper than that to the very core of your existence. You are hardwired for business success, you know it and you are eager to spread your wings in a new job or venture.

In my experience and study it is the business leaders who can maintain this expectancy of success and their excitement for business who pilot their companies to achieve the most remarkable results. It's mind over matter, strength of purpose over commercial challenges and other difficult-to-quantify characteristics of the successful that can take anyone to amazing commercial victories.

However, very few people can maintain this initial excitement very long or regain it once it's lost. The day to day challenges simply beat down their psyches and very slowly they lose that edge they had on Day One. Unfortunately it's that edge that was going to enable you to take your company to its maximum level of success; actually in about six months!

So what my accelerated business strategies are based on is business leaders having the mental focus to maintain that sense of initial novelty and excitement in their company for a continuous six month period. I've seen the results in literally hundreds of companies and they are always remarkable. With six months focused effort, unimaginable results are possible. Whether you have a florist shop in Melbourne, a wine distributorship in Houston, or a software firm in London, the outcome is always the same. Six month's focused effort combined with a just-opened attitude will catapult you beyond your competitors and deliver a level of satisfaction that is quite addictive.

In fact this is where serial entrepreneurs come from; they jump into a challenging and exciting position, maximize the company in

six months or so, turn it over to a solid management team and go on to the next new thing.

In the following several sections you'll learn my formula and gain the tools to take your winning attitude (remember you must maintain it without diversion for six months) and convert it into unprecedented success for your business, and yes I truly mean it will happen in six months or less. This path is what I call *The Ultimate Secret for Business*.

Identify and Remove Roadblocks

I wrote *The Ultimate Secret for Business* because there is a better way to do business and a better way to live. Most business people, almost by definition, have the talent to drive their company to a certain level but then it plateaus; it has gotten as far as it's going to without adding some entirely new strategies.

This situation is effectively a business rut; the most you can hope for is a 10 percent gain here or there and maintaining the status quo and putting out fires is the business leader's new job description. This is where *The Ultimate Secret for Business* will help you a great deal. If you're in this situation, and most companies in fact are exactly there, listen to your inner entrepreneur; I bet you're hearing "Isn't there something more? Was I wrong to expect amazing success? Where did I go wrong?" It's like you're in the forest and quite simply lost your way.

It's time to snap out of it. There are roadblocks around you that are stopping your progress and diverting your attention while wasting that terrific asset you brought to the party – your vision and your expectancy for success. There are a certain number of

blockages I've spotted that recur in almost every company; no, actually every single company. So, you're not alone. A large portion of *The Ultimate Secret for Business* was devoted to spotting and removing those blockages and I hope you'll double back and read those examples.

However, as we're giving you the executive summary because you're impatient, like all of us, and want to jump to the core of the message, let me give you two examples of the roadblocks around you, how to identify them and then remove them to take your business to a new level by regaining your new edge.

Where should you start? Start here – I want you to ask yourself “What is the one thing in my business that irritates me most? What causes me to wake up at night angry; what troubling thing am I worried about on the drive to work in the morning and what is removing my joy?” The answers to all those questions likely focus on one thing – the person or activity in your business that irritates you most. Eliminating that thing is where you start on your path to business success.

See if you can spot your irritant among these typicalities: Is your tech guy holding you hostage? Is a key supplier taking you for granted and jerking you around? Is your dolt of a brother-in-law nuking the marketing department? Is your top saleswoman deflating morale by acting as if she is above the rules?

Your irritant may not be exactly one of those but I'll bet 500 shares of my favorite stock that something just came to your mind as you read those brief examples. That thing is taking away your joy of business; is costing your firm the opportunity to excel and the situation is a roadblock you must deal with right now; step one on your path to unprecedented business success.

You'll read elsewhere in the book unassailable arguments why every tech guy is replaceable (yes even yours); why you should immediately establish a secondary supplier relationship to keep everyone on their toes (and let you sleep at night); why it's okay to reassign your brother-in-law to a less critical function (he's probably frustrated too); and why counseling or firing your lead sales woman is a necessary move. Executive summary answer – take out your number one irritant; then move on to the next one. It's a secret for business.

I truly love to hear from business leaders when they actually take this step. It takes courage and it's a seeming leap of faith but it's always the right decision. So, drop me a line the day after you take your first big action; I love reading what many people describe as “their new sense of freedom”.

You can learn about other specific roadblocks by reading the book but now you know the most important step in identifying and removing roadblocks: take out the first one. It's a wonderful feeling to look at your company with this new perspective – from the viewpoint of a blockage hunter.

Focus on removing blockages for just a few months and your business will suddenly operate with maximum efficiency but, while this is part one of *The Ultimate Secret for Business*, business leaders must take the next step to achieve maximum results.

Guiding Your Company Down the Newly Opened Path to Maximum Success

The road rarely traveled starts here; it's a magical pathway to the commercial Promised Land and it is only open to evolved business leaders who know *The Ultimate Secret for Business*.

While every company's pathway is slightly different, the theme is always the same. This is the direction for your firm that you're eligible to take when all the invisible blockages in your company are gone. It's an open road; filled with every possibility. Six months in this direction and your company can achieve its maximum level of success. While referring to "healing the business" I give a number of suggestions on great management practices to enrich your business. You are now on the path that was last open to you the day you started your company or took on the new management position. It's here now, so what do you do?

My suggestion over several chapters was to emulate the greatest business model in all of history. I'm not talking about JP Morgan, Crocker, Stanford, Huntington, Vanderbilt, Carnegie, Ford or even the modern technology billionaires; I'm referring to a family that comparatively makes all these people seem a small blip on the history of finance. Meet the Medicis.

This family ruled the financial and social empire that grew out of Florence, Italy for three centuries. They weren't the kings; kings came to the Medicis for favors, permissions, and counsel. The Medicis also weren't the high ranking clergy, who at that time often had much more power than the politicians. "The Church" came to the Medicis to borrow money and seek support of the Medicis power and influence.

The Medicis invented the idea of paying interest as well as double entry accounting.

Their cultural influence was even greater than that of their financial/political dynasty – they funded the artists and scientists of that period; they started and grew the Renaissance.

Somehow the power and influence of Bill Gates pales in comparison, does it not? So how does all this tie in to your

small or medium size business? What tie could a jewelry maker in Orlando or a clothing designer in New York have with the Medicis? The secret here is the two lessons we can all learn from the Medicis and they will change the course of your business forever. Further, these two concepts will give you the principles you must follow to effectively pilot your company to its maximum success.

The road is open to you, so what Medici concepts are going to rocket you along? First you must think big; but bigger than you can imagine right now, and Second, you must make long term decisions – but five, ten or even twenty times longer than your competitors. So do these two things and your competition in business will fall by the wayside so quickly, no one will even know they were ever there.

Please note once again that this is executive summary time; so in one sentence what we mean by Big is a geometrically larger and broader goal with a defined timeline than any of your competition. If your competitor is planning to be the highest grossing retail florist in all of Dade County, Florida, your plan is to control (not always the same as own) the highest margin retail and wholesale floral chain in the Southeastern United States with a strong direct import business of flowers from Costa Rica and baskets from Indonesia. Again, simply an example but illustrative of what I mean by Big like the Medicis.

And last of the two initiatives for you to undertake to maximize your tour down the path rarely traveled is your twenty-year, or even fifty-year plan. In my experience it's the business leaders who have real vision, who take the time to look down the road even beyond their lifetimes, who make the best and most profitable

business decisions today. It worked for the Medicis and it will work for you. These are the secrets to maximum business success.

Immediate Decisive Action

Nike hit the nail on the head with their Just Do It campaign. I hate to offer business wisdom based on sports shoe advertising, but that is exactly what I know you must do – simply Do it.

All around us we see wasted potential; think back to your graduating class – did any one of them achieve that potential all of you could see in each other on graduation day? There are a thousand reasons why people and companies don't achieve the pinnacle of their potential but those are all just excuses; some better than others, but at the end of the day all the reasons are just excuses.

You have *The Ultimate Secret for Business* in your hands and the final bit of this executive summary is that you must Just Do It. I can try to inspire you with the ancient saying that a journey of a thousand miles begins with just one step but I have greater confidence in you than that. I absolutely know, based on decades of experience, that you have exactly what it takes to own or manage a business to amazing heights of success – the maximum level possible; I also know you can do it in six months.

Your secret? Before you put this book down, pull out your pen and paper and identify your biggest irritant, take a run at writing down an immense goal, and write the first draft of the executive summary of a 20 year plan.

That's it; that's *The Ultimate Secret for Business*. I'm Ainslie Waldron and thank you for reading some or all of my book.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Ainslie Waldron is a Brisbane, Australia based management advisor. Her acclaimed *Theory of Accelerated Business Success* catapulted her to the world business stage and established her as the country's leading business thinker.

She heads the business advisory firm Ainslie Waldron & Associates. Ainslie and her team implement her proprietary process to swiftly clean up, tune up, turn around, and streamline small and mid-size companies. Firm clients are in Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom.

Prior to founding Ainslie Waldron & Associates she completed high level engagements for a diverse array of entities ranging from the United Nations to government entities and multinational corporations.

Among her designations and recognitions are Masters of Business Administration, Leading member of Australia's Mensa organization, Fellow of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Fellow of the Australian Institute of Management and others.

Ainslie's book *The Ultimate Secret for Business* is a blueprint for companies of all sorts to find unprecedented success based on her groundbreaking strategies.

She divides her time between Brisbane, Australia, the Northwestern United States, and the United Kingdom.

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