

# **Strategic Innovation**



**Finding Value in the Void**

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Finding Value in the Void

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# Strategic Innovation

My morning pick-me-up used to be Diet Coke. When I'd open my can in cubicle land, curious faces would appear over the tops of cubicles like groundhogs poking their heads out of their holes, trying to identify the maker of the misplaced noise. The question was supposed to be, "Starbucks or Tim Hortons?" Changing that default mindset could be the next big thing for soft drink companies.

What do I know? I've never worked in the beverage industry. I have worked in many sectors and held titles that included "innovation," but I don't claim to be a master of innovation. I am simply a student of the steps an idea must take to go from a spark to an offering to a market share. It's a process of finding the next big thing.

In the industries I've worked, they've called me a cowboy. I've been cautioned about the need to take "baby steps." Fast and big are relative terms, and things I classify as tiny little changes are seen as overwhelmingly big deals to other people. Similarly, I am sure there is something that you think of as no big deal, but I can't help but see as a chasm I'm unequipped to cross. When it comes to innovation, it's a chasm I know how to cross, but the genius is in the execution. It's up to you what to do when you finally understand how.

Finding the next big thing is finding value in the void. The word "strategy" can be cringy, as it's been overused and misused. Strategy means having a high-level roadmap that you will follow while being able to apply whatever tactics best fit your situation and goal.

Strategic innovation is finding value in the void through a deliberate process designed to circumnavigate human nature's known traps. You believe you are immune to them while you watch everyone else fall prey to unforced errors. However, my foundation rests on the belief that if you can expect it, you can avoid it. Strategy is avoiding it.

Finding value in the void is full of potential traps, some obvious and others well hidden from observation or expectation.

## Thriving in a Competitive World

Embracing a journey to become more innovative is the hallmark of a forward-thinking business leader. However, it's also the sign of a business in trouble or a career under threat, making a Hail Mary attempt to stay afloat. You are playing a long game as someone who wants to get ahead within a pre-defined system.

Maybe you are an employee, and the rules of the organization and the dominant culture are ones you observe with good reason. Perhaps you are a business owner in a well-defined market with traditional laws of supply and demand. Whatever your situation, you understand the forces behind winning, succeeding, or losing or failing, and you've proven you have game.

To make an impact, you need to understand the landscape of your industry.

You need to know what's going on at the leading edge and why it's leading. Networking, attending conferences and studying trade journals will help you gather the information and insight you need to leap into your career.

Opportunity is when luck meets preparation, so start getting prepared. Forget thinking it might land in your lap, show up on a job board, or come calling to your door. Strategic innovation is your ticket to thriving in a competitive world.

You need to look for problems that don't have a solution, no matter your role in an organization or the nature of your business. What's your expertise, and where does staleness, tiredness, or outdatedness exist? There is the void, and value is the bridge across it.

## 1. The Business of Value

Whether you learn how to succeed in business from others or if you are a natural-born leader, there are traditional ways to create profit in business. No matter what you do, you want to sell as much as you can and waste as little of it as possible when delivering what you said you would. Wasting as little of it as possible is the nature of the quality industry.

Quality is a journey; the need to innovate shows up when you still aim higher and the options run dry. Now, it's up to you, standing as you are, at the edge of a void with your long-term view on the horizon.

First, determine where you are on the journey of improvement. Over time, the quality industry evolves and changes, introducing new ideas that never grow old and highlighting lessons people don't need to learn firsthand.

At one Manufacturing Summit, a panel of industry leaders were selected to discuss Industry 4.0. More than one mentioned the need to Google the term in preparation for the talk. While that revelation might have shocked and dismayed some of the audience who were there to learn from experts and were quite capable of googling, to me, it's a matter of nomenclature.

It's all in the name. Just because you don't know the term doesn't mean you aren't doing it, but thanks for googling it, as it kept everyone focused narrowly on what was new and upcoming in the quality industry in the vast field of strategies and tactics.

Progress occurs through creative destruction in an unrelenting effort to become faster, better, and cheaper. Like the manufacturing leaders on the Industry 4.0 panel who had to Google the term, you don't need to know about the trend to take advantage of it, but knowing the history can help you avoid costly lessons.

## The Learning Journey

When companies new to the quality journey wanted nothing but the best, they assumed they needed to start with the newest, latest thing. Instead, as a Six Sigma Black Belt, I always responded that Six Sigma was like university-level quality. You get there because you learned all the previous lessons and were prepared to go further.

If you jump straight into university from anywhere, you are bound to fail. Also, like a university degree, you may never need it; you only need the paper with the certification and your name.

## The Dawn of Industry

The Industrial Revolution, the first of three prominent manufacturing stages, shifted people from farms into factories.

With the development of the steam engine, new chemical manufacturing processes, and iron production methods, goods were produced by hand and driven by machines. This period, which lasted from approximately 1760 to sometime between 1820 and 1840, primarily involved the textile industry.

The second revolution was the Technological Revolution. It was about mass production and rapid industrialization. The development of electricity and steel production marked it. It lasted from 1870 to 1914, until the outbreak of World War I. During this period, significant developments occurred in the light bulb, railroads, the internal combustion engine, and the telephone.

## *Toward Faster, Better, Cheaper*

When everything gets faster, so does the pile of waste. Whatever machines produce in quantity, they can produce non-standard products and by-products of similar magnitude. Remember Lucy eating the chocolates on the quality control line? Automating a process before it is fully optimized can lead to the production of defective parts at a much faster rate and in larger quantities.

Businesses begin implementing quality control when costs, supply, or customers demand it. The only quality control principle is to prevent customers from experiencing poor quality, not to stop machinery from producing it.

To improve the quality of the final product the customer received, parts were inspected, measured, and tested after they were made. Products that didn't meet the cut were reworked if possible or discarded if not. Those parts that don't meet the standard are reworked or thrown away, and the only way the customer ever knows is buried in the price they pay on what does make it to market.

Plenty of visible costs include material in waste barrels, unfilled sales orders, and stalled manufacturing lines. Toyota's Lean Manufacturing focuses on visible improvements and identifies various categories of waste. When smoothly implemented, it can work well in manufacturing environments with machines.

Lean Manufacturing is about streamlining the production line, with everything running smoothly and cleanly, like a well-operating orchestra to the beat of the customer's drum.

Buried costs are still costs. Quality control had the desired effect of improving customer perception of quality, but perception isn't reality. The added processes at the end of the manufacturing line and before the customer received the product were costly. They added resources from space, including people, tools, equipment, and the most precious commodity of all: time.

## *Focusing on Costs*

One day, those costs will be inspected and traced back to how they were produced. Solutions will then be implemented so that it's impossible to recreate the conditions that create non-conforming products. Quality assurance is this phase of cost reduction through investigating and eliminating causes.

You can only do so much on the manufacturing floor, and one day, someone asks why it wasn't designed in a way that would have made it easier to make. This is designed quality, where everything from the product to the line was considered for ease, cost, and quality before anything was built.

Quality control was superseded by quality assurance. Before the part is made, you know the machine is set up correctly, the material meets the requirements, and all other factors are in place to produce a product that meets the final specifications. That way, you don't have to measure anything else – you know it will conform to the standard. Like how a recipe and fresh ingredients produce good results in the kitchen, the same idea prevailed on factory floors.

While quality assurance requires more knowledge, it is far less costly. Before proceeding, you need to understand the key factors necessary to produce a satisfactory result and how to ensure they are in place. Still, you minimize the waste of time, materials, and space.

When Toyota introduced Lean Manufacturing in the early 1980s, employees were empowered to shut down the production line when they identified problems, which were addressed and resolved immediately. Contrary to assumption, this saved money and drastically improved quality.

## *Design with Forethought*

Designed quality came next. Since the manufacturers had control over product design, they could create a product that was easy and inexpensive to manufacture, thereby reducing processing costs.

At this stage of the quality journey, quality has moved from the end of the line to the line in the engineers' and product designers' offices. Ideas such as reducing the number of parts, simplifying part complexity, and minimizing part uniqueness are now being considered, even as products are still in the conceptual phase.

The thread of continuous improvement is that poor quality is costly, and the earlier you can stop it, the more you save. The more integrated the concept of quality becomes into everything else, the more affordable it becomes. Quality is not something added but the result of design decisions and manufacturing actions.

Quality control was an afterthought, like icing on a cake rather than being baked into it. Quality assurance baked quality in, and design quality started to examine the recipes themselves. Quality becomes the cheapest to deliver, not by adding it in or checking that it's there, but rather by removing anything that creates poor quality. The most affordable and effective way to ensure quality is to avoid actions that require correction, detection, or remediation later.

The core of process thinking is the most critical. If continuous improvement means moving further up the line, what's next? It's about the quality of thought, learning the traps of thinking that undermine our success and avoiding them, like you are doing here.

## The Relentless Pursuit of Fact

In one organization where I was an employee, we had an accountant with specialized training and a Six Sigma Money Belt title to prove that gains made a difference to the bottom line. Firsthand, I realized that their job enforced the doctrine that there could only be one project at a time per process.

Six Sigma Money Belts often fought against the launch of projects because of their inability to separate the impact of it from existing projects. This single focus accelerated progress, enabling massive projects to be completed in four to six months.

Serial, not parallel, work delivers the fastest and most significant gains for many reasons. Serial work allows for a scientific answer to evaluate improvements, not a social one, open to spin, illusion, and tall tales. Maybe that's the most crucial reason it's so much faster – it gets to the truth.

This organization had been working to define “quality” for decades, going back to creating life-saving contributions to the World Wars. They were ready for the next phase in the journey, Six Sigma.

After that organization, I never did meet another Money Belt. Everywhere else, they decided that the “one project at a time” approach was a waste of time, and estimates could fill in where clarity and separation were required but could not be achieved through the data. Where greyness exists, so does opinion and its ability to take over the analysis. Enter spin, illusion, and tall tales.

## *A Complete System*

Six Sigma was a quality system. Taking them piece by piece and leaving some out means the system is left on the table. It no longer functions as a whole; it takes high-level expertise to know how to perform the surgery on it and maintain effectiveness and efficiency or improve it.

Systems are created so that no one individual can bring them down and that a collective's best interest is protected. When a system is seen as one that works, it creates demand. In capitalism, demand produces supply; businesses are designed to supply the demand. As an industry, quality sells certifications, audits, training, and more, and like all industries, it's one with a clear start and a history of progress.

Not all progress is a linear lockstep forward. Instead, the stock market is the best representation. Some progress takes off, some die off, and the majority creeps onward and upward until a bubble forms and bursts.

There was a time when Six Sigma was invented, when you could make a lot of money providing training and certifications, and now, when a few hours and a few twenties can get you what looks like the same thing. Entrepreneurs noted the lack of a barrier to entry and the hundreds and thousands of sold certifications.

Finally, the idea of Six Sigma and the notion of a Black Belt became so diluted that they became irrelevant.

Just as Six Sigma came and had its heyday, the quality journey started when the steam engine was invented and had its heyday.



## *The World of Quality*

The rate of business failures is astonishingly high for first businesses. Second attempts fare far better, but not enough entrepreneurs make a second attempt. Bryan Harris of Videofruit will tell you that he tried and failed 28 times before getting it right.

Many businesses fail to become more than an expensive hobby because adequate market research wasn't performed. Think of the Segway. It had financial backing and mentoring from industry titans, yet the reality of its appeal to potential customers wasn't discovered until after production.

A manager must make daily decisions to keep costs low while maintaining high production levels. It's a delicate balance, and data and technology can make it more manageable. When the objective is to keep one thing down while raising another, the overall aim is optimization—doing your best with what you've got.

We all have experience with this. Whether you have a social media account or a real life, you have things you play up and things you'd happily keep out of the spotlight. The challenging task of management is determining which decisions and options are associated with which outcomes.

Business is about making a profit. Profits are the revenues remaining after all costs have been paid. In manufacturing, a manager contributes to revenues by increasing production or contributes to cost-reduction efforts by identifying ways to reduce costs.

Some of us study how to do better as a specific standalone topic. Above and beyond learning the content required for your job, someone has invested in doing things better, if only because it was in the business's best interest to do so.

## *Quality Outside Manufacturing*

Outside of manufacturing, conflicts cannot be resolved with measurements and evidence. There are no ball bearings. Instead, everything is fleeting, unique, and invisible.

You can get creative and reappropriate these ideas for a world of paper. Still, when you can't see it, the first objective seems to become materializing the invisible, measuring the fleeting, and characterizing the unique.

If you think you can convince employees to help "the customer", they will see right through you when they need a reference. "The customer" assumes everything to be free, perfect, and immediate; you will hear about it if it's not. Life requires references; the more impressive, the better.

If you are helping whoever is written under the logo, I hope you picked a first name to go with that because a legal entity also does not care.

The heads-down dedication of "doing the job" no longer cuts it. You don't want those who buy into it, and you can't afford to pretend to be providing such a luxury of zoned-out paydays.

In the world of big banks and established insurance companies making inroads with Lean Manufacturing-inspired management systems, it's a great place to start, especially if you can extract and focus on the concepts rather than the practices.

## Like People for Machines

However, taking Lean Manufacturing off the shop floor and into the office can be challenging for well-trained practitioners to look beyond what they've always seen. We repeat and adhere to our mentors' concise lessons, such as viewing concepts like "motion" and "inventory" as waste rather than considering the broader perspective of reducing costs and improving productivity.

In manufacturing, you may be able to recover some of your investment from waste, but in service, you have only one chance. When you get it wrong, it's far more costly than making a mistake in manufacturing. Recruiting customers for service is a lengthy and challenging process, and they are far more sensitive to reviews and word of mouth. Word of mouth that you might not be measuring and may not even be aware of when you are in service.

Your world might not be driven at all by material or labour costs. However, you can't help but see and measure software and salaries as a manager. To improve quality, you must be able to see what is fleeting, invisible, and unique.

When that conflict arises, it's not because a quality control person measured something and raised a flag. It's not even because they've moved on to include quality assurance, and fewer flags are being raised because negotiations are actively held with suppliers and customers about tolerance limits, requirements, and costs. Conflict could also come from the next phase in the evolution of quality by design.

The thrust of improvement has been centred on the importance of data-driven decisions; however, we now know that's not practical. Studies have shown that we are not purely logical but rather emotional. Decisions are made seven seconds before we even know we've made one. We are aware that we all have cognitive biases. Given equal information, we can justify whatever decision we want, even when we aren't consciously doing so.

Psychologists have better tools to help understand why we make logical errors. I think the future of quality is in our thinking. Quality of thought occurs when we recognize our cognitive biases and emotional triggers rather than acting on them.

## Quality in Service

Faster, better, and cheaper is needed in service businesses. This isn't confined to goods. We aim to lower our insurance prices and increase our stock holdings in those companies. Competition exists for every business; staying still and sticking with the status quo is a surefire way to fail.

The first stage of the service revolution is scale. Consider how banks were formed in the real world. Lenders became bankers, bankers hired tellers, and mergers and acquisitions created institutions too big to fail. You grow by carving off your workload to others so you can take on more of it.

Stage two involves mass customization. In a service business, the customer and the offering are unique. When you can find the common core and quickly add customization, you have the equivalent of a manufacturing line. The common core can be mass-produced while maintaining the essence of individualized service.

The third revolution was the Digital Revolution. It began in 1968 with the first digital message being sent and received, laying the groundwork for the Internet. It continues today with personal computers, the Internet, and information technology. By 2017, 47 percent of the global population had access to the Internet.

Stage four, or Industry 4.0, involves embedding technology into production. The idea is to empower people in service, just as manufacturing empowers machines.

The fourth stage in service follows the same principle as manufacturing. It's about empowering people to make informed decisions in the moment. They are informed, enabled, and empowered to do the right thing for the customer.

Where Arik Segal says, "the Fourth Industrial Revolution holds unique opportunities to improve human communication and conflict resolution," the same is true in service and support functions.

### *On the Dawn of AI*

Industry 4.0 elevates technology to a new level. Where the digital revolution facilitates data-driven decisions, the fourth revolution enables this process to happen even faster. Data-driven decisions require data collection, cleaning, and analysis before action. The next level shortens this loop. Instead of collecting, cleaning, and analyzing data, machines communicate with each other in real time. Technology is embedded within machines, society, and even the human body. The rise of AI enables, not threatens, their futures.

In 2015, Jeep issued a recall after a pair of hackers demonstrated to WIRED magazine that they could remotely hijack the vehicle's digital systems over the internet and bring it to a stop on the side of a highway. Of course, it could have been worse if these hackers had ulterior motives. Imagine hackers taking over your manufacturing plant. Investing in security makes sense for your doors, employees, and digital assets.

Like the Digital Revolution, service businesses and support functions are progressing to the next stage with automation and technology. Forms are found and filled out online instead of on paper. People aren't confined to cubicles; they can collaborate with colleagues worldwide over the Internet.

When problems happen in manufacturing, they are apparent. Defective parts pile up. The manufacturing line backs up. Costs mount up. Customers complain and then stop buying. In service, the problems are much more insidious. When you fail to make payroll, there's no denying a problem exists.

In service, we have waitresses with Bachelor's degrees, customer service representatives with Master's degrees, and florists with PhDs. You have filled positions with qualified candidates, but they only go through the motions. They might be wasting time gossiping, surfing the internet, or taking long lunches. That's what you can see. What you can't see is the wasted initiative, creativity and experience.

### *Unexamined Potentials*

The waste isn't just in the lost potential contribution of each individual. It results in a culture that creates backstabbing rivals, work-shy colleagues, and stressed-out employees. It shows up in mental and

physical health problems. It leads to escapist behaviours like smoking, drinking, and overspending. Empowerment matters not just to the profitability of your business but also to the health and wealth of the economy.

It's not just about soft-skill development; it's about helping people approach work with a proven mindset of continuous improvement. You're never satisfied when you know what you and your customers genuinely want is free, now, and perfect. Are you there yet?

Instead, examine your decision-making process and recognize the benefits of taking corrective action more quickly, effectively, and affordably. You empower and enable machines to do it, freeing people to do the things machines can't. Wherever a person can do the work a machine can do, redeploy that asset to do creative, innovative work.

## Imperfect Improvements

With increased competence should come increased power to make decisions in real-time without seeking permission first. Re-engineering is the practice of reducing the distance between the incident and the decision-maker. In management circles, it's called empowerment.

Engagement permeates our everyday lives, showing up in health, wealth, and relationships. When we are disengaged and try to accept it as our lot in life, we spend on things we don't need, eat things we know we shouldn't, and spend our weekends binge-watching Netflix, trying to ignore the Monday around the corner.

What makes sense for your business and maturity level is separate and distinct from yours. The objective is to understand your current situation and identify your next steps.

An executive team member at a large organization once asked me, "Why do people leave their brains at home when they come to work?"

Excellence is achieved by viewing the entire system and understanding your current leadership position. Your imperfect products or services may still be the preferred solution for your customers. For some products and services, 41 percent is incredible.

For others, find where help is required and focus on the lowest level of performance. It is no good if one tire of your car is perfectly inflated and balanced when another is flat, a third is the wrong size, and the last one is on blocks. Again, it is about achieving a consistent level rather than perfection in one area to compensate for deficiencies in another.

## Whys and Myths of Failure

Are you addicted to Candy Crush, yet wonder why your attitude toward repeated failure in that game doesn't translate to the rest of your life? Game designers know something about failure that you do not yet know.

While working on my answers to what I was doing differently, I desperately wanted to see if I'd arrived at a way to explain it well enough to others so they could do it. I needed a cohort willing to learn and try.

In the search for this opportunity, I finally saw a chance to take it. I explained to my leadership that the Lean Six Sigma material they wanted me to teach was flawed, and I could tweak and modify it as needed.

They'd witnessed my ability to successfully create transformation when top-notch external consultants and themselves had suffered failure after failure. In fact, after completing the first significant milestone, they asked me to press pause while a consultant was brought in to evaluate what I'd done. But would that experience be enough for them to say yes?

After all the projects were closed, the same audience sat for the presentations. Ultimately, the sponsor turned to me and said, "I knew immediately something was different when you took a seat at the back of the room instead of taking the podium."

Many managers say they want people to bring their brains to work, but few follow up on their desire with action. If you want people to show up to work and think critically, you can create a culture that supports this.

### *The Difficulty Facing New Ideas*

Fresh out of university, I was full of questions but didn't get many answers. "What do you think?" became the standard response until I expected it and no longer bothered asking questions, investigating for evidence, or connecting the dots.

By not providing the answers I wanted, my manager gained insight into my thought process, where I sourced the information I considered, my concerns, and how I interpreted the context. In contrast, I could see other managers quickly providing answers. With gentle probing, thanks to my honed questioning skills, I realized the differences in motivation, thanks to that manager.

The second group of managers suffered from imposter syndrome. They thought that providing the answer demonstrated that they knew it. The time to do that is when the question is coming from above. When the question comes from below, don't show what you know; find out what they know.

There has been considerable concern about how suggestion boxes can backfire to the extent that many have been removed or avoided altogether. If you don't give feedback, people will stop contributing, they say. If you don't reward the originator, they will stop giving away their ideas, they say. They claim to ensure the originator receives the credit.

The downsides don't outweigh the benefits. Rewards can be as mundane as a pat on the back, which might be enough. On the contrary, when rewards are high or based on the value of an idea, soft ideas or minor improvements will remain undisclosed.

Ensure employees understand that their ideas matter and have a straightforward way to share them. Significant relationships between managers and employees, open-door policies, and even the ability to send an email to upper management and get a response are options to instill the culture of thinking.

### *The Penchant for Control*

Letting go of the penchant for control takes a lot of effort, but it's well worth the difference it makes.

The roles in which I was most productive were where I knew my boundaries and how performance was measured. I owned from this wall to that one, and from this floor to that one. I had a box. Within these very real limits, I could do and was charged to do anything I needed to do to meet the expected target.

The roles in which I was most confused, stressed, and felt I made hardly any difference were those in which I was charged with following instructions to do something. I didn't have the context or freedom to add or subtract work to optimize effort. I was driven by fear of not checking the right boxes, completing the templates, or producing the proper evidence. I felt like I couldn't think even if I wanted to.

One of the biggest challenges a manager can face is being promoted from colleague to manager. The manager tends to hold on to an expert status instead of letting someone new step into that role.

When the role change happens in title only and not area of concern, the manager becomes too controlling of the work, fails to adapt to changing requirements, and destroys the innovation and new ideas of the people on the front line. Additionally, how are they managing to find the time for their new job?

Parents understand the importance of patience in building capability. Yes, you're running late for soccer practice, but you could be on time if you intervened and tied your kid's shoes yourself. Being late is worth the investment. Your employees need the same considerations when deciding whether to do it themselves more quickly and effectively.

However, remember that your number one priority might not be speed or cost.

### *Encouraged to Try Again*

Gamers know that as long as they get a chance to try again, they look forward to that chance, plan better, and improve their strategy, even if they don't realize their brain is doing it. Responding by trying again instead of giving up isn't something we do, but we can ensure we create by design. What was worth it the first time and never tried again?

Never before has access to courses been so varied and easy, so employees should not sit back and wait for training to be delivered.

Career progression doesn't always mean moving farther up the chain. The more people are exposed to different parts of the business, the better context they have for what they can bring to improve it.

Two to five years in a position should be ample time to learn, contribute, transition to the incumbent, and move on. Moreover, they should know the possibilities to determine what is most appealing and what training would help prepare them for their next adventure. The development discussion should be open and honest between employees and managers, and the culture should foster movement, not stagnation.

Not everyone wants to think. Some people are happy handing over accountability by doing what they are told. Some people struggle to bring the energy to actively engage in their roles due to life circumstances or personal choices. But those who do want to think are worth finding. They are flexible, incorporating others' ideas and feedback. They possess the intelligence to gain insight, the social skills to

win people over, the communication skills to explain concepts and answer questions, and the persistence and resilience to see it through to completion.

## *An Onus for Change*

How effectively do you set priorities and hold yourself accountable? Your performance strongly indicates your success in work, relationships, and life.

In relationships, we've all heard stories about wives who leave because they never see their husbands. The husbands claim they were out providing for them all day and night and point to the lavish lifestyles they offer. For the wives, it wasn't about money. The husbands didn't realize their time was priceless until the thing (person?) they valued most was gone.

You can't measure progress if you don't know your priorities. It's not progress if it's in the wrong direction.

Not everyone realizes that there is a threshold beyond which money doesn't lead to greater happiness. Between meeting all your financial needs and buying everything that money can buy, you realize there's something more. If you don't stop and reevaluate your priorities periodically, you may be chasing goals long after you've achieved a satisfactory level of success.

Fulfillment is individual, just as the set point where having more money doesn't matter is unique to each person. Setting your priorities is something only you can do, and you know you've done it right. You can only know you've done it right when you can hold yourself accountable.

## *Pick Your Performance Level*

The first step to setting your priorities is to determine the short-term future you want. Back in university, my priority was easy to establish—passing. I prioritized achieving passing grades in each of my courses, not excelling, simply passing, as that was difficult enough.

While it was an intentional milestone and deliberate expense in my life, many students were unaware of their end goal. They were unsure if they wanted to be there or in a different program, university, or path in life. Or, they were distracted by every new thing on the horizon, as it was the first time they'd moved in their lives, and there was so much they hadn't seen.

At that point in my life, failing was not something I wanted to be known for. When you want to make decisions as straightforward as possible, make them identity-based decisions. Each option will always create a different identity for you, and identities influence how you act.

One of the most unappreciated lessons co-op programs teach you in university is the power of short-term goals. You can give up almost anything and pick it up again in four months, letting potential distractions disappear with a simple "See you soon." You can grit your teeth and suck it up with almost anything for four months, just, also as co-op taught, as long as you get a break in between periods of intensity.

Connecting your priority with a deeply desired identity will give you the inner discipline you need to achieve it.

## *Act Out the Behaviors*

The next step is to do what that kind of person does every day. If you want to be an author in the future, authors write, so write every day. An engineer solves problems, so I made sure to tackle problems every day.

I observed that the students who left voluntarily approached their homework as a social activity. They either discussed it together or were skilled at asking technical people the right questions; whatever the approach, exams were not friendly to those individuals. They are likely the right people for projects and corporate settings, but the filtration system – writing exams – wasn't favourable to them.

The realization that working alone to resolve problems was what the system favoured meant I spent my time working alone on a wide range of issues. Figuring them out for myself behind closed doors with lots of scrap paper. A weekend might be spent conquering two or three issues; others might be two or three dozen.

Since failure was not an option, weekends were not spent partying, socializing, shopping, or running errands. That school term, weekends were three-stop events: the bed, the desk, and the shower. Workouts were added to the agenda after I realized the importance of fitness and exercise in problem-solving.

Eventually, the things that start with conscious, deliberate action become automatic and unconscious, like walking. Basic skills, like walking, always make more challenging skills easier to tackle.

All advanced skills can be broken down into smaller ones, and these more minor skills form the foundation for more complex ones. Always be on the growth curve, the one with the risk you can tolerate.

## *Check Your Actual Expenditures*

Once you know your priorities, setting your agenda to accomplish them and evaluating whether you are doing so is straightforward. In university, any activity that directly correlated positively with passing was a thumbs-up; if not, it was a thumbs-down.

I could easily calculate the hours I spent doing things that were thumbs up versus those that were thumbs down. Sneakily, I also knew the value of those hours and paid attention to using the first hours of my day to tackle the most complex problems rather than showering and dressing.

Later in life, my priorities show up in how I spend my time, energy, and money. If you are ever in doubt, track how you spend your highest energy, how much time you spend on various relationships and activities, and where your money goes.

Do those priorities reflect the ones you'd rank without those facts? If there's any disconnect, you need to re-evaluate your behaviours.

Reflecting on your goals and progress in these five steps might be the most strategic time you spend on your business.



## When Opinions Clash

What starts as molten liquid gets pushed through holes and cooled to become anything and everything from airbags and carpets to hosiery and dental floss. Despite graduating as a chemical engineer, I worked as a mechanical engineer, helping to spin it. The mechanical engineers were working as chemical engineers, helping to manufacture it. By offsetting expertise against placement in the supply chain, they were embedding teamwork instead of creating silos of expertise.

Maybe the art of embedding teamwork is one of the things you figure out when you've been hiring engineers for a hundred years.

Every great team needs to be able to resolve conflict throughout its existence. Even the most effective teams will experience conflict, and it may be that conflict makes them more effective. Knowing how to resolve conflict enables the team to use that conflict to their advantage.

Conflict begins when one person believes another has negatively impacted something vital to them. Conflict sparks emotions because it triggers unresolved disputes that may be entirely unknown. People in conflict become so fired up because it is an emotional issue.

Not all conflict is destructive. Conflict can result in greater productivity, increased creativity, better decision-making, and improved relationships. Teams that avoid conflict often fail to build trust and ultimately become unproductive.

## *Envisioning Progress*

Engineering is about minimizing waste, maximizing choice and flexibility, and optimizing quality. Engineers get carried away when they forget that consumers don't want to pay for the sheer pursuit of intellectual curiosity. Consumers get carried away when they expect perfection now and make it free, please.

Progress is defined in that struggle between consumers and engineers. Make innovation worthy and valuable, and they are willing to pay for it.

Everyone has an idea of progress. Everyone has an answer for what a better tomorrow might look like. Like me, they may be short on hope, faith, or reality, or long in the tooth with denial, idealism, and timelines, but you, too, have an answer, and maybe even a vision, for progress.

Progress is messy, and we are all control freaks from birth. If you are human, you can't help but realize there is a future and want to impact it. Quickly, you know that others, too, want to have an effect, and there are allies and enemies no matter what you wish to, ways to get things, and things you aren't supposed to do.

To improve, you can see people and problems. People are lazy, mean, or stupid. Problems are tenacious, unpredictable, and complex. Innocent people get caught in problems, and bad people create their karma.

Either way, life is not going to be smooth. Not for me, when the girls got called to the kitchen to clean up after a meal, and my brother went with the men to watch the news. Behind everyone's backs, he

stuck out his tongue at me, and I've met many men who had no sisters and knew nothing of their privileges.

How do you know until you know what it is like for someone else?

Sometimes, team members who disagree need time to calm down, process the situation, and gather their thoughts before engaging in conflict resolution. Sometimes, you must also determine how to approach the situation. In both cases, avoidance is the most suitable technique. Retreat from the problem until a later time. Use phrases like, "Can we talk about this later?" and "Let's table this conversation until tomorrow when we have more time."

When time is tight and you need to keep things moving, you don't have the luxury of avoiding conflict. Sometimes, nothing will change the facts, and you must make an unpopular decision. This is when you need to force a resolution to the conflict. It involves pushing one viewpoint at the expense of others, resulting in winners and losers. For instance, you may use phrases like, "If your next report isn't on time, I will have to discuss your continued membership on this team with your manager."

### *When Relationships Come First*

When the relationship matters more than the issue, for instance, when one person has significant power over another, accommodating the conflict means emphasizing areas of agreement rather than areas of difference, which downplays a conflict and prevents arguments or ill feelings. The result is one person giving in to the other. You likely have some experience with accommodating conflict if you are married. Phrases such as "That's okay, I don't mind this time" and "Sure, I can do that for you" are typical of the accommodating technique.

If you need a temporary solution to a complex problem or two parties with equal power and mutually exclusive goals, compromising can be the best technique. It involves negotiating a solution that will bring about some degree of satisfaction to all parties involved. For example, phrasing might sound like, "If you send me the report a day early, I'll review it for mistakes so you don't have to proofread," and "I'll write that report for you if you attend my customer meeting."

Teams frequently employ collaboration techniques to integrate perspectives from all team members. This is the proper technique when both parties have concerns or interests that are equally important and can't be compromised. It can take more time than simply choosing whose ideas to adopt, but in the long term, it will undermine the relationships within the team, and people will jockey for the position of favourite.

Collaborating ensures that equality is part of the message. It leads to general agreement and buy-in from each member. It might sound like, "How can I help reduce the extra hours you've been putting in?" or "How can we create a solution that works for both of us?"

### *Settle for Alignment*

When parties resist taking the initiative to work together and collaborate, you may need to encourage them to do so. Like collaboration, this is achieved when you must reach a mutually acceptable solution

and gain buy-in from all parties. You may need to facilitate identifying the root cause of a problem and its best solution by examining alternatives.

Examining alternatives requires a give-and-take attitude and open dialogue in which team members assess and consider options. This approach often provides a long-lasting solution to conflict because everyone on the team is involved in working toward a solution to the cause of the conflict. You might use phrases like "OK, let's try to get to the bottom of this."

As you've read, conflict can lead to better solutions and foster stronger relationships. Not all resolution styles are always appropriate, but when you have choices, you can better align to the best one for your conflict. Recognize and address it before it gets out of hand.

## Find the Root

We use Root Cause Analysis to find out what went wrong. The root idea is the event or condition that precipitated the undesired effect. It is not necessarily the most likely thing that happened. It is not necessarily the most significant contributor. Roots are the first things that grow. Nothing else would happen if you took that thing out by the roots. We want to work on root causes because they are usually small things with huge payoffs.

A root cause is the first failure that occurred. Think of an avalanche and a snowflake. You notice that avalanche causes significant problems, but the disturbance that upsets the snowpack layers is the root cause. You could call the disturbance the root cause.

The root causes are not that simple. It's easy to go too far back, as the avalanche's root cause was the mountain's formation. It's easy to enter territory where you can't do anything about it, as the cause of the avalanche was the shift in the weather. Since nothing happens in isolation but rather as a result of a chain of events, there are many possibilities in various directions. When identifying root causes, lean toward things you can do something about, like measuring conditions and informing people in the area when to stay away.

Not finding the actual root cause changes the problem instead of solving it. Side effects are introduced, whether visible or invisible. In addition, you've changed for the sake of change, destroying information-rich baselines and tying up precious resources without added benefit – even while it depends on who you ask.

## A Disciplined Review

Is it any wonder that such a simple tool is also one of the most avoided? In one organization, it is an excuse to do nothing: "Don't do that because you are not working on the root." We need a simple and effective way to identify a good stopping point. Good stopping points are points of failure.

If the process followed wasn't documented and little history is available, a lack of known history may hinder your root cause analysis. When that is the case, this is where to start by way of improvement for next time.

Clarify and document the process. Memory is fallible, and everyone does things differently. The reverse view can be impossible without a documented process, such as a recipe or procedure.

Create time for deliberate analysis. We often assume we know what happened, are pushed for immediate solutions, or fail to take a complex and complete view of what went wrong.

Find a case for change. Instead of finding something we can impact, we can see many reasons why we cannot do anything about it.

A successful root cause analysis can ensure maximum productivity by ensuring that your work's results have a maximum impact. Avoid common pitfalls and identify a specific actionable cause.

### *Between Symptoms and Overwhelm*

Stopping too early, the lesser of the two evils, causes the problem to recur. It brings an opportunity to try again. The issue will likely resurface, although the initial solution may modify it. It might look different, arise in a different place, or create a distinct impact.

In the medical profession, stopping treatment early often addresses the symptoms rather than the underlying cause. A depressed patient is given Prozac, apparently with the underlying root cause of depression being a Prozac deficiency. Doctors know this is not true. It may be due to a dietary imbalance, inadequate exercise, or a toxic infection.

Going too far is more detrimental as it leads to a lack of action, and the mistake becomes undetectable – a lost opportunity for improvement. It leads to root causes that are too big to tackle, are the responsibility of a different team, or are attributed to a general overarching theme that leaves little insight into a solution.

The result is a shift of blame, boil-the-ocean problems, or simply a change of course. Action toward elimination or resolution is paralyzed, frustrated, and inflamed. Instead of taking action to work toward a resolution, it can lead to no effort or effort akin to pushing a brick wall—again, with no benefit or return on investment.

How far is too far? Lao Tzu, 2,500 years ago in China, ruled on a case involving a thief who had taken half of a wealthy man's wealth. Lao was sentenced to six months in prison. The rich man protested, claiming he was the victim and should not be punished. Lao Tzu responded, "Your need to be in jail is greater. You have amassed substantial money for yourself, depriving many people. Your greed is creating these thieves."

### *Failing through Modes*

Remembering and rewinding the steps is hard enough, but knowing where to stop is the secret to successful root cause analysis. You stop when you've found the root, not when you've lost the trail.

Failure modes refer to the various ways in which a system or component can malfunction or fail. Typically, there is more than one reason behind every issue. When we address these issues, we can uncover simple solutions, identify which ideas are worth the effort due to their impact, or discover new ideas that were previously not apparent.

Determining what went wrong isn't always straightforward. It is a journey backward into history. Accurately and precisely recording history has always been a challenge. Memories are imperfect; notes may not make sense, and significant gaps and contradictions will likely be found.

Whatever action makes the future unquestionably better would seem clever, but it's worth checking to see if you've made the common root cause analysis mistakes.

Like that three-year-old who can't stop asking why, we can become fixated on one idea or branch and continue to follow it. Every step back with a why question can have multiple answers or possibilities. Root cause analysis should create a tree with many branches. Sometimes, that is the only way to uncover the so-called perfect storms, where a combination of factors contributes to an overall failure.

### *Severity, Occurrence and Invisible Failures*

When selecting an improvement, look to minimize the severity, reduce the occurrence, or increase the detection of failure modes. When something fails, it leads to dire consequences. The consequences are usually many, and they are certainly not equal. Some are worse than others. We use the term severity to compare these outcomes. To improve something, make the consequence of failure more tolerable.

When something fails, how often does it do it? If my toast is burnt the first and only time that I've been a patron at your establishment, it's very different than if it happened once in a long time or nearly every time. Improve problems by paying attention to when and how often they occur.

To improve, make the first impressions matter, and sustain that performance as long as possible. Instead, businesses aim to exceed expectations. It's terrific to be delighted, but consistency matters more to loyalty. The following experience might look even worse when you aim to exceed expectations. Don't exceed what you can't sustain.

What steps can you take to reduce the frequency of occurrence? Typically, this category drives our attention— "I'm going to make sure that never happens again!" When things are within our control, it's the most straightforward category to tackle; however, the other two categories can provide further ideas when the issue lies with someone else.

The last is detection. You can't improve something if you don't know it happened. The sooner you become aware of something, the sooner you can take action. The earlier you address an issue, the cheaper and more efficient the solution will be. There might be an error-proofing device or two to assist you.

### *Influencing People*

Many problems become significant before a cross-functional team is assembled to conduct a root cause analysis; there are likely multiple root causes. Just like climbing Everest, melting an iceberg, or eating an elephant, eliminating the root causes one at a time in the right direction is the sustainable way.

What are the right directions? Businesses are made of people; at the end of every root cause is a person. Even when the root cause seems to be a bolt fatigued before its lifecycle, it begins in someone's mind and ends in someone's hand. There was a person who designed, tested, manufactured, and

installed it. It's not blame we are looking for, but lessons, knowledge and insight to be used for the future. We seek new and improved methods to regulate the inputs, ensuring optimal outputs.

One of the most popular root cause investigations involves NASA's Challenger disaster. The media reported that the root cause was a ring failure. However, more accurate root causes suggest that human nature often leads to committing to a plan despite contrary evidence.

Management had been informed of the likelihood of the launch decision's outcome, but it went ahead anyway. Other accounts describe a lack of clarity in the message, often lost in engineering tables, graphs, and diagrams. Still, others point to PowerPoint fatigue, the disengagement we have all experienced from slide after slide.

Looking to human nature as the root cause might seem daunting, given all the nuances and intricacies that make every one of us so interesting and unique. We are much more alike and share the common elements that make us human.

### *What People Do*

Knowing better does not always mean doing better.

Inherent internal motivations govern our gut reactions and instinctual decisions. When we want to do something, passion overcomes all else. What comes naturally also comes easiest. Making significant hiring decisions and getting the right people in the right jobs are one way to assure quality. This factor is controlled through hiring, responsibility, and ownership.

On the other hand, when there is disinterest or dislike in a required behavior or task, there are many avenues to avoid it. Insufficient time is a common and possibly valid excuse when we are overutilized. Disinterest and dislike can arise from various factors, such as changes that expose a hidden skill gap, cause the loss of an identity, or impact a relationship.

Encouragement is the cheerleader of behaviour management. We all fear rejection and disappointing others and, hence, seek to follow the encouragement we are given. It helps us find the extra bit of effort when we are drained, provides us with the faith that we can accomplish something that might have seemed out of reach, and pushes us forward.

Expressing encouragement is controlled by the messages sent and can take many forms, from verbal to nonverbal. However, the most potent form is the opposite. Studies have shown that as many as 20 encouragements are required to undo one discouragement.

Acknowledgement is the pat on the back for a job well done, the nod or cue to convey that an effort has been noticed. It is the feedback that is received. After all, if the effort isn't seen or appreciated, it is likely to be dropped.

### *What People Know*

Knowledge is fluid. What we took for fact years ago – that the Earth was flat and at the center of the universe – is no longer considered a fact. Like the citizens of that era, the journey to knowledge begins with not even knowing what we don't know. The next step is to identify what we don't know; we have

determined the questions to ask. In the third stage, we are unaware of what we know, so we cannot question it. The fourth and last stage involves knowing what we know.

Knowledge is transmitted and shared through training, work instructions and prior education. Knowledge is difficult to disregard; once we know something, we can't return to what it was like before we knew it. Once we learn to read, letters are no longer abstract squiggles.

People know how they are measured. With many examples of measures driving the wrong behaviour, whether intentionally or unintentionally, it is a good idea to look below the surface of the measurement for the root cause.

We all have somewhere to turn when we don't know what to do. A colleague, friend, or peer can constantly offer a suggestion, good or bad. While this is obvious, it is also one of the underpinnings of corporate culture. Where rules are missing, procedures are not documented, or processes are poorly defined, determining the proper course of action can be unclear.

Advice forms habits and procedures. Habits, as they say, are hard to break but not impossible. This is the bane of change efforts and certainly not limited to business environments. Breaking habits takes time, intention, and effort, but we expect people to change overnight when we pay them.

### *Where People Are*

The environment significantly impacts our behaviour, so implementing the 5s quality tool can reap significant benefits. In one organization, an operator required a critical ingredient which was out of stock at her station. She could leave her post, which would cost downtime. She could ignore the lack of cost quality. Or she could pull out her supplies from her purse.

Unfortunately, her brand was different, severely impacting the company due to its effects on product testing, investigations, and customer complaints. An environment with an adequate supply within reach is one option that could have prevented this costly situation. While 5s is a valuable tool, its principles emphasize that we utilize what is within reach, in good working order, and readily available.

Even beyond that, we are a product of the environment. One engineer moved all the chairs from the room's perimeter to the table to increase participation at operational meetings. Now, attendees were front and center of all the action, including and involved, and participation drastically increased.

The cleanliness, state of repair, design, and setup of environments all impact our behaviour. After all, we might put our feet on our coffee table, but we know this is unacceptable as a guest sipping tea from fine bone china. It's the environment, loud and clear.

Reward is different for everyone, although the most commonly thought of reward is financial. True, most of us work because we need the paycheck, but other reward systems have been proven to be more effective.

### *Fitting the Culture*

Culture fit is critical; the successful job candidate owns at least fifty percent of the equation. When cultural fit isn't right, its roots are often lost under too many layers of politeness, legal protection, and

personal degradation. Understanding the importance of a problem solver will help you get the right people in the correct positions.

As a candidate, I made some colossal mistakes when choosing the right culture fit for me. Some potential errors were avoidable by recognizing the glaring red flags, but at other times, it was almost as if I was color-blind. I'd seen the flag but mistakenly interpreted it as a positive sign. When these mistakes extract dear costs, if there is a benefit to my experience that I would like to pass along, it's how to avoid being the wrong hire.

You may realize it quickly when you are the wrong hire, but correcting the problem can be difficult. As someone who created a business to own my side of an employment situation, let me help you avoid going through such a long, arduous journey.

### *Pride of Ownership*

More than once, I was a possession more than a contributor. The marketing professional told me that her father wanted her to be an engineer, and now she gets to tell him that engineers report to her. I was glad I could help her with the esteem and acceptance issues with her parental figure, but it did nothing for me. Hate is the logical emotion we are wired to feel when others put their needs ahead of our own at our expense.

Another time, a CEO told me he took pride in telling his peers that he had a Black Belt on his payroll. Jack Welch said, "If you want to save one million dollars a year, get a Black Belt on your payroll." Unfortunately, it takes more than just hiring them.

A third time, a VP wanted to do things his way, but the CFO pointed out that he had no authority, credibility, or experience on the subject. I was hired to address that objection, only to learn the phrase 'perception management.'

As a candidate, it didn't occur to me that there might be reasons to hire someone other than to get the work done. Watch out for the long list of reasons, and try to avoid becoming a service to someone else's ego. It will crush your soul, and you'll have to save it.

Over-hiring occurs when you impress them with your experience and credentials, only to realize you never needed them to do the job. It's as if they look at you and think, 'If you can handle that complicated work, maybe you can manage this basic, mind-numbing task.' ' Maybe. More likely not.

### *Requirements from Last Time*

I work with managers to question whether they truly need the requirements they claim to have. If you believe you require that, what are you requesting?

My engineering degree ultimately proved that I was capable of teaching myself. Over the five-year program, I can't say that I've used any of it. Daedalus Dave, recognized for the brilliant edge he created with his mechanical engineering skills, estimated he only used 10 percent. He said he would suspect he surpasses anyone else at that level. I agree. There are many other ways to prove you can teach yourself, with significantly lower costs.



One thing I learned about trophies is that life is as dull as one. You get put on a shelf and only get dusted off and paraded around occasionally, only to be put back again. You look good, and if that's all you need, it can be a cushy gig if you're not worried about convincing the next interviewer that you've accomplished anything significant.

If you interview with one team and then get an offer to report to someone you've never met, do say no. I didn't think it was a big deal the first time it happened to me. After all, I was joining the organization not because of a specific person, or so I thought.

I'll have you know that the opposite is true. You aren't joining an organization. They say that people leave managers, not organizations, meaning they should also be joining managers, not organizations. Managers create the culture of their team, not the organization, meaning that the microcosm you will call your workday life might be very different.

### *The Game of Work*

When that happens, don't think that HR is your friend. HR is the organization's friend. That's their role. Ultimately, the job belongs to them – it's not yours. You are a placeholder, a mere renter of the role. Like renters, you have rights, so don't confuse them with the rights of ownership.

Some people in human resources think it's their job to help you do your best. You might want to secure a permanent position if you find the right culture.

I've found that HR realizes their managers are responsible for attrition problems, but they can't fire them. Instead, they no longer let them conduct the interview but used a bait-and-switch tactic with this candidate. Sure, it shouldn't matter to whom you report. However, it's the most critical information in your search for a culture fit.

So much so that you can be suspect when you land in an organization where every leader has a sidekick that follows them everywhere; you aren't going anywhere but out if you aren't a sidekick. Information has power, as it now allows you to craft your own game.

Yep, it's a game, as I learned the hard way. People don't do what is right; people do what is easy. If you want them to do what is right, you have to make that the easy way. Such is the secret to my success when I have it and my uncompromising mission in life.

The easy way means that squeaky wheels and bullies get raises while crucial conversations are consistently rescheduled for the future. What are you willing to tolerate? That might be the one answer that clarifies all others regarding cultural fit.

## 2. The Foundations of Growth

As a business, the strategy of success is understanding the mindsets and attitudes of your potential customers. It's not just about why a customer isn't buying more or won't return. It's about people who want nothing to do with you and why that might be the case.

Don't write them off with the old excuses I've heard. "They just don't get it," said one app developer who lost all their savings in pursuit of their project. "They are going to love it," said one restaurant owner who lasted less than a season in business.

Strategic innovation is finding a committed customer because not all positive feedback transforms into a future sale. When they say "Yes, I would," make them prove it. We think our future selves are wonderful people who will work out, floss and contribute to the best causes. But the person we are today sits on the couch, will floss tomorrow, and has a reason why they can't afford it right now. If a 'yes' doesn't translate to a pre-sale, they might be more concerned about being polite, protecting your feelings, or avoiding further questions.

Potential customers who leave you frustrated and don't understand are showing you what you don't know you know. You've forgotten the journey that converted you into a natural expert. You are on the mountaintop of expertise, looking across a chasm at someone else who climbed a different mountain. They have a distinct knowledge of what you do; that's all.

The problem is that you are suffering from the Curse of Knowledge. The Heath brothers, Chip and Dan, brought this to light in their book, **MADE TO STICK**. They capitalized the phrase to reflect the drama they felt it deserved, and there's no minimization of that drama here. It's a worthwhile deal.

The curse of knowledge refers to the psychological tendency that once you know something, you cannot imagine what it is like not to understand it.

Here's an experiment you can try for yourself. Think of a song that both you and your friend know. Have your friend guess the tune while you tap out the beats. Elizabeth Newton did this experiment in 1990. Tappers thought the listeners would guess correctly half the time, but after 120 tries, only 3 were correct guesses. Talk about frustration!

When subsequent frustration hits, take a deep breath and a step back to decide how to address this opportunity.

## Ideal Customers

Your ideal customers might be the ones who are confrontational, whom you think don't understand, and who leave you frustrated. Of course, you don't want to work with people who leave you emotionally drained. What if the trick in converting them is all in your perspective? This post may completely change your perspective and help you find more ideal customers.

When you speak with customers who understand and agree with your perspective, the problem is that you are talking to the choir. They are more apt to think they don't need you because they come from the same angle. To them, you are a peer, not a provider.

If you can help customers who don't understand the philosophy, rationale, and value, you will establish yourself as an authority and win a new customer. The trick is understanding their perspective first and stopping trying to explain, justify, and defend your own. That doesn't come naturally.

When you learn something new, first, you don't know what you don't know. Then, you get into it a little, and you can identify the things you need to learn. You get to the point where you know what you don't

know. You become proficient in those areas and recognize what you know from there. After that, it becomes natural, and you don't know what you know.

## Your Value Proposition

Every industry has its language, foundational principles, assumptions, and inherent value proposition. When speaking to someone outside your industry, such as your ideal customer, you must speak in their language, explain your foundational principles, defend your assumptions, and clearly articulate your value proposition.

As a result of your curse of knowledge, you might have forgotten all that information. You have adopted a language that seems essential to you but holds no meaning for the person you'd like to have as a customer.

This happens to me all the time, and when it does, I nod and go along with whatever they're saying, but I'm just waiting for them to stop talking and move on to someone else. They tell me what they do, and I know the words. My vocabulary is well-developed. I have an active imagination. I've had the opportunity to see inside and consult in various industries.

I'm not alone. It's rare for someone to stop you and expose their vulnerability, such as not fully understanding what you are talking about. Especially when you are selling, we are all protective of our budgets and wallets, and salespeople are trying to hijack our agenda with their own. So, when we are polite, we nod and wait.

## *The Confrontation*

If you are fortunate enough to have someone say, "Why would I need you?" it means they don't understand the fundamental value proposition of your industry. Not the one that sets you apart but the one that makes people study for years before they have the knowledge to work within it. You need to respond with clarifications so the layperson can realize the inherent risks you've learned to avoid.

Industry assumptions can become exposed in this way. As a cost-reduction specialist, I'd assumed that executives wanted to reduce costs and understood the necessity of being operationally excellent. Yet, I couldn't help but notice their lack of enthusiasm for the work. Ultimately, I realized that closing the business was the most effective way to achieve cost reduction.

There you go - zero costs. Because of that realization, I discovered that they prioritized revenue generation first and foremost, keeping their jobs second, and third, having a story to explain the numbers that convinced everyone that the downsides were out of their control. That's it. The whole industry assumed there was a pressing need that didn't exist.

With this insight, I began to notice it in more places. Career consultants hired to help customers find new work after being laid off believed their job was to support the candidate rather than the employer, demonstrating that they had done everything possible to mitigate a potential lawsuit. Ergonomists believe they help employees avoid injury, which benefits the company as it aims to minimize its WSIB payments. When you understand precisely why they are paying you, you start to discover the reality of the value you can provide.

### *An Unwanted Solution*

Like trying to sell operational excellence to executives, we often try to sell solutions to problems when the customer would call it the other way around.

Business coaches aim to help companies grow and increase profits, while the business owner sees the process of swapping one set of problems for another and hiring more people who will each bring a new set of problems. Why grow when I'm comfortable right here, they ask.

Often, we are selling apples when they want to buy cupcakes. We sell what we think they need, and they want to buy what they want. When people want to buy something, the price doesn't matter. Consider the debt that most households and countries are currently carrying. "But I wanted it," they tell their financial advisors and creditors. Instead of selling what you want, consider selling something they want to buy.

### *An Undifferentiated Solution*

Recently, I needed to hire a plumber. Google offered page after page of possibilities, and each said the same thing – we do it all. However, after the first three came to quote, I realized they were so utterly different that they all polarized me in various ways. Only two out of three followed through with a quote, and only one was anywhere close to something I might pursue. They had very different positions and value propositions, yet at first impression, they were interchangeable.

When you appear interchangeable, you might think you're avoiding driving away potential customers. However, the opposite is true. You might have been my perfect plumber, yet you're sitting on page three of Google, and I'll get tired and give up before I reach you. The truth is that no one is interchangeable.

In **NOW, DISCOVER YOUR STRENGTHS**, Marcus Buckingham continued the strengths revolution that started with the decree, "The great organization must not only accommodate the fact that each employee is different, but it must also capitalize on these differences." That, too, is what makes for stand-out businesses – capitalizing on a difference.

If you strive to be as competent as your competition, you are likely headed toward a commoditized business where you can only compete on price. Finding a niche for your business and identifying a specialty doesn't mean sticking with only that forever. You nail that one and then go on to add the next. You grow by mastering one stand-out service and building on that solid reputation.

Your niche may be an opportunity to learn and grow. They may know something you aren't aware of that renders your knowledge moot. Is there a worldview in which their choices or actions make sense? Higher levels usually mean access to more information. Adopt an attitude of curiosity and investigate. You may end up making your value proposition stronger.

Alternatively, it is an opportunity to teach. What exactly do you think they seem to lack? Teachers don't just dump knowledge but ensure the learner picks it up. Hone your listening skills, build your communication skills, and develop your negotiation skills to convert that customer standing on a different mountain peak than you.

## Profitable Business

Although you may know that your most profitable business lies within your niche, you may be unsure about choosing one.

Instead of deciding, we live repetitive lives, stuck on a general track. Like a genie in a bottle, we hesitate to get specific if we pick the wrong one. Break free from your paralysis and let go of your fears by quickly identifying the truth of your niche.

Your niche isn't something you pick; it picks you. Your target audience isn't the contacts you've gathered from the online directory. Instead, they are the people who already seek you out when they have a problem and know you are the only one to solve it. From there, you might expand into online directories, but first, you must learn more about your magnetism from those initially drawn to you.

Your profitable business niche is doing what you do best, which is what those who know, like, and trust you want. We do business with people we know, like and trust. We buy when we want something, not necessarily when we need it. As providers, we do our best and become our best when we do things we enjoy and have a natural affinity for.

When you find the intersection of those ingredients, you can find your sweet spot of business success.

## Enjoyable Work

The first key to your business niche is that you genuinely enjoy spending your time in it. It has to be fun most of the time.

Okay, not everything is fun all the time. When I read Lance Armstrong's book, *It's Not About the Bike*, I concluded that it was more about his ability to tolerate pain and discomfort than that of his competitors. Now I know, like you, his doped-up blood likely helped.

Before that knowledge, the book led me to believe it was the ability to work longer and harder when given an edge. Maybe it's true; perhaps it's not.

What are you willing to spend time doing longer and harder than most other people? I love writing and singing songs, but I almost failed music for a good reason.

This is a time for you to leverage what you already know comes more easily to you than others. Indeed, there are still things you can learn or build upon your skill set, but it's best to start from a solid foundation.

This foundation will give you confidence and set you up as an authority. It doesn't mean that if you are a software engineer, you need to stay in tech but use transferable skills in new ways.

## Making a Contribution

It must contribute positively to a community and make you want to join it.

Can you solve a problem, satisfy a need, or share an insightful idea? Contributing is not just pointing out ways to improve things; it's about improving them.

Criticism is easy; creation is worth your time. Yes, acknowledge the problem, even let it bother you, but instead of rallying against it, look in the opposite direction and eliminate the issue at its source.

I found a way I could contribute positively to the world of business. I wanted to solve the problems that make work suck – products or services that are mediocre or embarrassing, teams that destroy each other or fail, and the inability to make the changes that make a difference.

I think the world is becoming too small for us not to get along, ignore, or outdo each other. We have just one planet to share.

In your ideal niche, there is room for growth. You are spending just a little of your time on it now, but later, could you spend most of the day at it, for most days? Can it generate a sufficient return on investment and lead to new and more significant opportunities?

Whether you spend that increased time doing more of the same, finding and building a more significant community, or developing and deepening your contribution, it should have growth potential. You may not know how it will grow, but you must see if it's contained or constrained.

### *Your Know, Like and Trust Quotient*

You already have people who know, like and trust you. Do you know yourself enough to listen to what they say?

Successful entrepreneurs know themselves, warts and all. You can't define your version of success if you don't know yourself enough to know what you truly desire and what would drain your energy. If you love creating code, growing a software company might not be your thing. Instead of the solo hours and long periods of focus that energized you, you are now in meetings, leading teams and managing public relations all day.

Don't give up what you love in the name of growth; get creative and brainstorm other options because there are always alternatives.

As an entrepreneur, your personality, passions, and ambitions will help you succeed, whereas that's not as true in the employee world. When employees must fit into roles and meet others' expectations and demands, you can design everything to be a perfect fit for you and what you can contribute to the world.

Successful entrepreneurs listen to their heads, hearts, and guts to hear what isn't working for them, rather than trying to adapt to a mold created by and for someone else.

When you research who they are and what they want, you can connect their needs with one of the following ideas to create a new revenue stream.

You should start now if you haven't yet collected information from them. Obtaining their contact information will enable you to notify them when they need to be informed, and knowing their demographic will allow you to target your ideal market more effectively.

Where you feel you belong has a specific need. They are already interested in what you do and may not fully understand it, so they may not even ask a follow-up question. Help them out by getting out of your

lingo and listening to why they might want to know more. Those questions will help you find your most profitable business niche.

## Successful Innovators

Successful entrepreneurs' uncommon habits lead them to go against the grain and contribute positively to the economy. How they do that remains up to them, and it remains a tall order that is a lot easier with these five uncommon habits.

There is no defined and accepted playbook for transitioning from zero to launching a successful startup. There are best practices and case studies to follow, but the hallmark of an entrepreneur is someone who ultimately has to make their mark and decisions. Here are five uncommon habits that help successful entrepreneurs tap into their uniqueness and create thriving businesses.

In "**THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE**," Stephen Covey suggests that we should begin with the end in mind. When you start a business, knowing where you want to end up might be your most important decision. Building a business requires time, effort, and sometimes an investment of your hard-earned money. You don't want to spend all that only to realize you've ended up somewhere you didn't want to be.

A successful business doesn't have to have many employees and be on its way to an IPO. Mentors and advice-givers often assume that this is the true and only path, but when you look past the headlines in the business section, you'll find a diversity of business models and measures of success.

When your business model aligns with your personality and goals, you'll build a business that provides work you love, meets your financial needs, and allows you the freedom and flexibility you desire. You want to pursue whatever else you want out of life because work and money aren't everything.

## Deconstruct Advice

They say that advice is worth what you pay, but I've received some free gems, given a few away, and paid handsomely only to hear garbage. What makes advice worthwhile or not is how well it applies to you and your current business situation and goals.

When I tell people I sell courses, they say, "You should run webinars."

My go-to response for all unsolicited advice is, "Why do you say that?"

I've yet to hear an answer that provides more information than "Because that's what I've heard."

There's nothing wrong with the advice to run webinars; it's a good tactic. The problem is that running your business solely on tactics won't yield the expected outcomes. What you need is a strategy.

A strategy answers the question, "Why are you doing that?" As in, "Why do you post to Facebook every day?" What are you attempting to accomplish?" When you know why you are doing something, you instantly have a more refined approach to how to do it. Your rationale helps you determine, for example, what kind of posts to create, when to post them, and whether they are achieving the return on the time and effort you were hoping for.

You get lost in tactics without knowing the purpose behind what you are doing. Every tactic requires time and effort before you can assess whether it's delivering results, and you can try thousands of tactics. If you jump from one tactic to the next, you will exhaust your resources before you stumble upon what works. Successful entrepreneurs are always brutally focused on the next right thing for their business, not the next tactic, fad or trend.

### *Shrug Off the Restart*

Successful entrepreneurs know it's okay to start over. To them, it's no big deal, while statisticians scare everyone with the rates of startup failures. The stats also show that the more times you ride the entrepreneurial roller coaster, the more likely you are to last longer.

So, what if you realized you've misspelled your business name, offending potential customers or making it impossible for them to remember, or you're tired of having to tell everyone how to spell it every time you say it? Learn, change, and move on.

Mastering the learning, changing, and moving on cycle is what separates successful entrepreneurs. There will inevitably be mistakes in your research and testing. Alternatively, you may encounter a situation you never anticipated. A million different things you can't predict can happen.

You can shrug it off when you do your best and know that no matter how good your best is, you can't prepare for everything. Sometimes, it's okay —and even the best thing to do — is to start over. You may even realize that what people want from you is different. It's always easier when you sell what people genuinely want.

### *Endure a Little Discomfort*

Human beings are born with a basic wiring to avoid pain. We are aware of the insidious nature of this wiring due to a trick played by Edouard Claparède. In the early 1900s, he treated a woman who had suffered a brain injury. The injury prevented her from processing new information. Every time he met her, he had to introduce himself to her.

On this fateful day, he placed a thumbtack in the palm of his hand. For the first time, when she shook hands with him, she suffered a painful prick. After that, she refused to shake hands with him for every subsequent appointment but couldn't articulate why[i]. She had excuses but could never connect her refusal with the previously painful experience.

Successful entrepreneurs know it will be uncomfortable, but they do it anyway. After all, how damaging or painful is a pinprick? In the grand scheme, it's a pretty small hurt. Yet, it's enough to change behaviour without being conscious of it.

The good news is that researchers have also proven that the learned fear-of-pain response can be repressed. Had Claparède continued to greet his patient without the pin, the brain could eventually relearn.



We can relearn because we choose to. Use your conscious will, determination, and stores of courage and confidence to persist until you achieve your goals. That's the luxury of being human: questioning ourselves, observing our actions, and testing our thoughts.

Can you recognize the moments in your life when you are withdrawing your hand, so to speak? Pain protects us, but like a helicopter parent, the protection can go overboard. Success hinges on your ability to endure pain; the thresholds are much lower than you think.

## Daring Bravely

Some people have faith in leadership, while others doubt authority. Some would do anything you ask of them simply because they fulfill their duties. These people have disconnected from accountability.

Then there are the rebels, the free-thinkers and the status quo breakers. Some people care about their impact. When they say no to you, you have no idea what they are saying yes to, and you may never discover the answer.

There were decades between the disagreement I knew and felt in every cell and my ability to articulate it in a way that someone else could understand. For some, it's better to adopt the Queen's stance – never elaborate, never explain. As Shonda Rhimes says, No is a complete sentence.

There are ways to gain compliance without changing minds. Force is always an option, as is trickery, deployed by the Nazis to get people into gas chambers while thinking they were about to take a shower. School systems deal with bullies by threatening them with the horror of having to ride to school on the pink bus – a bus painted pink deliberately for this reason.

Shame, fear, and negative emotions create action. Problem-solving won't be discussed here because it's not about winning but solving. Negative emotions are short-term solutions with long-term consequences of their own. You don't have to unite people, but you do have to solve problems, not create new ones.

## End Wishful Thinking

My older sister agreed to go on a week-long camping and portaging trip through Algonquin Park with me for one year. Later, desperate to recall the conversation, I can't tell you how it came about. I had a whole week to think about it—a long time to reflect alone.

When I arrived to pick her up, she told me she wouldn't go. This was the truth; that was clear. Nothing was packed.

I called ahead to change my canoe reservation into a kayak reservation and continued my plans. I'd only learned to paddle a kayak a few weeks earlier. Just in case, I thought then. However, I'd grown up with this person. If I'd asked her if she wanted to go, her only truthful answer would have been no. Anything else that came out of her mouth might have been hopes, wishes, and dreams, but not the truth. Worse, I had fallen for it. Hopefully, I hadn't pressured her into it.

Everyone has a reason why she didn't refuse immediately but waited until the worst possible moment. When we look ahead at an invitation, we see the delight in pleasing someone and having achieved an accomplishment—in short, the cake and the icing.

Regarding paddling, mosquitos, and backpacks, we see blisters, bruises, and dirt.

Leaders talk about how they learned to say no. It's better than letting people down or having to follow through on something you'd instead not do. Next time, before you say that you'd love to, stop and imagine if you'd say yes to it right now. Is there something else you'd rather say yes to instead?

Is anyone allowing you to trick yourself with your wishful thinking? I hope you don't find out, because when you do, it will likely be too late.

### *Owning Your Truth*

You don't have to shave your head or say it out loud, but you can't try to push it away once you know it's there.

Of course, we try to push it away; sometimes, trying harder is the only correct option. People debate whether it will harm others. The problem is that pain is not a criterion for the merit of a decision. Pain is a proxy for the status quo. People want to keep things the same; change is a pain. Standing up for yourself might be as simple as getting up and leaving.

My first word was no, which makes sense because you don't have to say anything if you don't want to go along. Nod and smile; when you're ready to see change, you must say so. Use your words, I hear parents tell their kids.

"No, you're not." I've also heard them say this when the child says things like, "I'm cold," "tired," or "hungry." Parents do that because they are caught between a rock and a hard place. Instead, there is a need for good parents, and no solution is available. Instead, they teach their children that they don't know the truth.

When someone intentionally tries to convince another person that their truth is bogus, it's called gaslighting. What do you call it when it's not intentional, maybe even done with the best intentions?

I've been trying to strike the word "should" from my vocabulary. Like counting the 'ums' and 'ahs' in Toastmasters, I think it's contributed to the number of times I've noticed this social-policing language. It's a word we use to make other people change, and I don't want to make anyone do anything. Help, sure. Not make.

### *Owning Universal Truth*

16-year-old environmental activist Greta Thunberg addressed the UN with "How Dare You?" I'll tell you how they dare and explain who "they" are because that is the fundamental problem.

Pointing fingers at people is rude. The playground monitor would grab the extended finger and twist it painfully at the person pointing. This behaviour is now a cause for uproar. As history shows, what is expected and acceptable to one generation is not allowable to the next.

On the playground, we were asked to consider how we started it, how we were to blame, and how we were the problem. This is often a valid point. For Thunberg, climate change evokes a phrase I frequently hear in the insurance business: “pre-existing condition.”

A pre-existing condition is an insurance contract stating something to the effect, “If it’s perfect right now and remains that way, we’ll cover it.” If not, too bad.”

You don’t want to reach the point where it becomes an argument. Your time and budget are limited, and theirs is not. Some people with jobs and livelihoods depend on being able to say no. A science writer once said, “It’s tough to get people to believe when their livelihoods depend on their disbelief.”

Your peace of mind is what you are paying for, not coverage. Instead of following the example of Insurance Companies and washing their hands of the parts they don’t want, Thunberg is saying that this hand-me-down is filled with ozone holes and smelly gases. There isn’t yet an exchange store for that, although Mars is slated to open soon.

### *Going Bravely into the Unknown*

Go ahead and get angry. I also had higher ideals for what individuals should be entitled to. As a child, I learned that clean air and water were things to protect. We hiked and camped, knowing the value of leaving a place better than we found it. I also realized how long you had to sit in a car before you could get to somewhere called the outdoors, and I lived in Canada.

Root cause analysis examines the underlying factors to identify what triggered the issue. Past the immediately identifiable initiating event. Past the O-ring that failed. Ask more about why they knew, yet the proper action to cancel the launch didn’t happen. How dare you wasn’t asked.

Finding the root of people-based systems is challenging, but it's part of the work of my current company.

If I, as a child, was supposed to leave a place better than I found it, what were the generations before me that taught me this? If they were taught the same lesson, then the problem remains with how we make that evaluation. Better or not?

In business, it frustrates me to no end when someone proudly declares improvements or savings only to cause equal, if not more significant, work and damage to a different part of the organization or to shift the whole problem into the future. Change for the sake of being busy, creating jobs, and returning to being busy again.

Some people argue that the world is better today. They choose indicators that have nothing to do with the environment. However, the environment might be primary, and when the Earth is done, does it matter how much stuff and money we make? It would only be if it successfully resulted in an escape plan.

## Clarifying a Common Truth

As someone who was also an angry sixteen-year-old and is well in touch with that source of motivation today, I think it is worth considering the answer. How dare they? It's not a rhetorical question. It needs an answer, and we won't move forward until we realize how we got here.

The first assumption is that to create change, we need politicians and policies to initiate, facilitate, or implement it. Others argue that technology is responsible for progress and change. It's time for contrast to stop producing conflict.

When you utilize policy and politicians to advance the green technology program, you align both intentions and join forces on the same side of the issue. It's time for cooperation, not competition.

Another assumption is that what is right will drive politicians and policymakers. A politician is like any other human. (Some might say I raised them to that status; some argue that their lives are ones of serving the public.) If they are human, they have human motivations, just like the public. It's time to replace separation with unification.

Third, we seem to think that shaming and blaming deserve a place here. We need to learn from and move past the past. It's time to replace alienation with affirmation.

## *A Difference in Belief*

Humans are fundamentally motivated by belief. Some people believe that survival is their instinct. They make sure they don't miss a meal, run away from loud noises, and never say anything to upset other people.

Some people commit suicide. This is the opposite of a survival instinct, which is enough proof that survival isn't fundamental.

People often rush into burning buildings as an instinctual reaction to sirens, screams, and other loud noises. Few take a stand. Rarer still are those who do it knowing it will cost them everything but their stance.

Survival is not the only motivation, but when politicians prioritize getting re-elected, they are unlikely to upset their voters. Leaders who prioritize protecting bad jobs at bad companies over abiding by the law. A specific leader who put that activity into motion who hasn't righted the wrongs. Canada is still without the attorney general we had, the one who I thought had proved morally worthy of the job. We've seen his true colours, and to me, this is far more problematic than the makeup on his face.

How are we motivated as a voting public? If we listen to politicians, we decide with our wallets. We listen to the promises, calculate how much we will stand to lose or gain, and then mark the box with the right colour—blue, if you ask me.

## *A New Insight into The Brain*

It's about two decades into the new world, where we know that people don't make decisions like that. We aren't logical actors. It's all about biology, which gives emotions a running head start. Guts and hearts decide. Heads provide proof, such as mundane, bureaucratic, and intellectual paperwork.

When I listen to the dimpled candidate delivering sombre news, I can't help but wonder why he thinks it is such a laughing matter. It isn't; it's his face I can't get past. The candidate who tells everyone that racism is holding him back, well, I can't get past the laziness of religion slapping me in the face. When I read that members of his religion think they are so superior as to merit themselves a separate race, I look in the mirror and wonder what to call myself. Able to rise above the automatic?

Science suggests that we all are, and I believe the point of consciousness is recognizing when we are doing it and choosing better.

I need a politician who pushes for the Truth instead of turning to God for a quick answer. This requirement is because we need a leader who can collaborate, and a foundation of truth is the only perspective we can all share. After that agreement, we can all believe and see what we want, but the facts are as they are. Is there any champion of fact on the ballot? Speak now, please.

Voters have responsibilities. Thunberg might have been talking to the voters, not the elected leaders. Elected leaders are already compromised because of their vested interests – they have too much at stake in the wrong one. When you vote, I hope you hear her voice.

I did, and I don't care because I have no investment in future generations. I have no concern for how the world looks in 100 years because I have no descendants that will be around then. Thunberg resonates because it's not just about the Earth; it's about living with the results of the dogma of previous generations and pretending it doesn't stink. You can't always see it, such as ozone holes and smelly gases, but that doesn't make it any less damaging. Frankly, it might make a difference in your lifetime. Like me, you might want to do it for yourself. Go ahead and be selfish.

## *A New Question for Everyone*

How dare you?

Do you dare to continue to look up to the thinking, actions, and beliefs of people who are no more intelligent than you with protection and reverence? Not only were they no more intelligent than you, but they also had less. Less information, fewer tools, less access to help.

But complacently, the public sits, spends, and sleeps on repeat.

Less and less as the generations go by.

Why does it always take the child to point out that the emperor is wearing no clothes? Do adults become worn down, tired, and overwhelmed by the numerous problems in the world, leading them to do nothing about them, or are they too distracted to notice? The root cause of how they dare is because they can. Can you?

Or do you dare?

Climate change, embarrassing politicians, and trivial headlines prompt us to ask how to create peace in a culture of conflict. The media is stirring the pot, pushing people to take sides. On Saturday, the International Day of Peace, it may seem like we are farther away from it than ever.

To mark the occasion, I began the day by listening to an interview with Dr. Scilla Elworthy, a three-time nominee for the Nobel Peace Prize. Elworthy advises that we act by determining what breaks our hearts and then applying our best skills to that work.

What breaks my heart is the everyday experience, or at least my own. In my experience, working life is mired in conflict. Regardless of your organizational structure, some individuals have power over you and those you supervise. Dictatorships don't work for society, and at work, can't we do much better?

## Finding Common Ground

Indeed, some people don't pass along negative emotions and maltreatment, and there are sunny days when even jerks act with compassion. Still, I think most of the workday experience is one of conflict.

My daily expectations are not clear enough to allow me to plan my day more productively. Then, there are debates, agendas, and perceptions. The employee has to navigate this territory. It's a gauntlet when there aren't tools, techniques, and protocols to guide behaviour.

Don't get me wrong. It's not helpful when everyone agrees, and false harmony prevents real issues from being discussed and tackled. I've been in that culture, and it didn't work, either.

It's a dream when everyone is aligned with the same values, appreciates the overall puzzle and their role, and has the appropriate freedom and autonomy they need to work at their best. Then the alarm goes off, and you wear your armour to face another day.

A whole career like that? It breaks my heart that this is the reality for too many people. I understand there are more significant problems, such as unemployment and the inability to pay your bills. People put up with uncomfortable conditions because there's a worse alternative – the devil you don't know.

## Personal Accountability

As I sat in cubicle land, shaking with frustration and anger, I tried to get calm enough to decide what to do. Days into my new job, I'd just been asked to craft a deck of lies, "darn lies and statistics," and I was morally opposed. My engineering ring and ethics class meant I picked up the phone instead of going to work.

The best skill I can apply to improve the workday experience is creating tools, techniques, and frameworks to guide discussions in crucial conversations and critical decisions. Instead of relying on what happens organically, conveniently, or socially, let's approach these things with the open eyes of experience and education. We recognize that the outcome is likely disappointing, so let's exercise wisdom in planning more effectively.

We could undoubtedly spin the outcome to minimize the disappointment instead. Alternatively, I've seen that we lower our expectations more often. We focus on what we see and know when things go

wrong, such as when specific individuals won't receive raises or others will be laid off, while pretending the whole thing was supposed to be a team effort.

We need a workaday revolution in which we show up to think, innovate, and be ourselves in ways that allow us to all help each other grow into the people we know and believe ourselves to be when we are at our best. The idea of being 'well-rounded' and scoring people against a universal set of standards, such as the school day reports, should follow the robots and leave knowledge workers alone.

### *The False Harmony of Teams*

One of the first things I do is dismantle teams and define individual sandboxes, otherwise known as roles. When you have a team, you start from a place of reduced potential, so use a team only when necessary. Then, set it up like a field of experts, like an orchestra or football team, and get a good conductor or coach.

Note that the coaches and conductors are not on the team. They get the best out of the player rather than using the player as an extension of their hands. It's tough stuff, so again, let's only do it when we've exhausted easier, faster, more robust options.

We are all in it together. It takes a deliberate organization to deliver profits to the bottom line. When silos become warring factions or teams become individuals with personal agendas, profitability is lost. This is not news.

We recognize this within our organizations and are starting to accept that we are together. The individual cannot succeed when doing so causes the collective to fail, but we all operate as if we will get out of this life alive.

What breaks my heart about the whole workday experience is the sheer loss of life. By that, I include the zest that disappears during high school and reemerges sometime after retirement. I include the years that pass without notice, attention, or engagement because it would be too painfully apparent if you did see.

If you'd like more peace in your life, a shift in your perspective is all you need. Your life is your only possession; the most important thing you spend is your life.

### *A New Definition for a New Concept*

Hearing politicians argue for jobs conjures in my mind the fabric-wall jails where humanity, creativity, and contribution go to die. We don't want jobs. A job is where you show up, grind, and go home, only to barely recover before doing it again. Isn't there something better we can strive for instead of crying about robots taking over?

For me, the workday revolution started with a new definition of retirement. There is a movement of people who enter the workforce with the primary goal of getting out of it as fast as possible, and I'm with them.

However, the exit day depends on how you spend your time.

If you spend time applying your skills to what breaks your heart, you don't need to spend much and stand to earn as well. If you want to retire in hedonistic luxury, it will take longer to achieve that goal.

Why not disregard society's milestones about what you should do at each stage and decide how you want to spend your time? After all, you have one life. It's a bucket of time. Every drip that leaves your bucket is one that you will not get back. You do not know when the bucket will empty.

With that knowledge, how do you want to spend your time? Make no mistake that time and money are intricately related, and you might have spent far more energy thinking about money.

Don't seek revenge, justice, or empathy for the other side. Instead, decide if you want to spend a precious drop of your time toward that goal. You'll suddenly realize you have far more critical things to do.

## The Elements of Need

When the product or service you provide to your customers is good enough but doesn't address all their needs, you are ripe for being blindsided by a competitor that meets all their needs. Don't risk the potential impact on your sales by evaluating your customer offering against these basic five needs.

Professor Noriaki Kano developed his model based on customer needs in the 1980s. His primary purpose was to improve customer satisfaction and guide product development. Not all product or service attributes are equally valued by the customer. Different requirements and features can influence customer satisfaction in various ways.

Customers buy because they need and see a potential improvement in their situation with your product or service. Not every need is equal, but each translates into a requirement that can set you apart from the competition. It can also explain why you might struggle to attract and retain customers. With Kano's model, you can assess the five elements of need.

## Satisfaction Levels

In business and life, it's impossible to make everyone happy. Trying to do so makes no one happy enough to assist you in your success. They aren't impressed, so it doesn't come up in conversation. Word does not spread. Testimonials are lukewarm and fail to inspire anyone with their mediocrity.

When people tell you they are dissatisfied, consider when that is a good thing. You want to attract people who are an excellent fit for you while repelling those who are not. You want to do it early so you aren't wasting anyone's time or being bogged down with refunds.

The objective is to polarize your audience. You don't want people in the middle, who are neutral or okay with your offering; you want people who say, "Yes, please."

As much as you can listen for the ends of the spectrum. Blandness and niceties can kill your business and frustrate and exhaust you while you're doing it. People don't act on "meh". They act on pain and pleasure. They act when they are at one end of the spectrum or the other, more often when they are at the pain end.



Identifying bland things can drive costs out of your business. You must stop spending money on something when customers are indifferent to it. For instance, packaging. Some industries invest significant cash in packaging to make their products appear larger or more luxurious. For some, that isn't very pleasant because we know we are wasting our money when we discard all that.

When they complain about things everyone takes for granted, pay more attention. Accept the reality of the complaint and try to get under it. For Ramit Sethi, a personal finance guru, he realized all his colleagues were complaining that people don't budget. Yet, that was where they all wanted to start, as the foundation for a more prosperous life. Instead, he accepted that people don't budget and didn't try to change that. Instead, he starts by explaining how to reduce the interest rate on your credit card. Yes, please!

It all comes down to listening to feedback. You will receive feedback from everyone you talk to; you must know whom to listen to and disregard. When people show interest, ask them why they are interested. Dive into what made them perk up. Accept their complaints as reality and meet them where they are, mentally and emotionally. At the same time, when people shut down, find out why. Listen and identify clues for polarization.

## Implementation Levels

More is not always better. Implementation levels help you understand how far you can take a feature or benefit until your customer is no longer interested in paying for its amplification.

Take cars, for instance. I don't want to spend much money converting my vehicle into an office. I only want the basics from point A to point B. Power windows and air conditioning are all I want, yet I couldn't find such a car on the market. I have to buy a car that assumes I am a crappy or distracted driver while giving me all the widgets and gizmos to take my attention off the road and into the vehicle. It seems like a Catch-22, but it creates many jobs on both sides of the issue.

When you listen to customers, listen for ways you might be driving them away by providing too much. I needed some marketing support, so I requested a proposal from a professional marketing consultant. They went all out, thinking of everything they could provide to take me specifically from where I was to the next level. To say it was out of my price range would be an understatement.

Another time, I requested a quote to remodel my two bathrooms. I'd researched what people pay and what pays off when I sell. The quote came in at four times what other people had paid. It included all kinds of bells and whistles, including painting. I wondered why a plumber would add that, but there you go. No sale.

Customers don't want to feel like you see them as blank cheques. They want to know you will give them what they need, no more and no less. Listen for what you might be doing too much of, and scaling back might be your ticket to more customers (while saving you time and money!).

## Delighters

We've all had the experience of delight. We got something above and beyond what we expected in the exchange. Those services, features, or attributes are referred to as delighters. They don't stop us when

they aren't there, but it's a yes-please moment when they are. Delighters inspire us to talk, share, and return.

People won't tell you what would delight them because they don't always know. Here's the shortcut: everyone wants it now, perfect and free. Which one can you impact that your competitors can't?

When considering cost, the last item to concern yourself with is the price and the terms and conditions. Offering a payment plan instead of a one-time fee might unleash a wave of new customers. A 30-day money-back guarantee may encourage skeptics to make a purchase. Then, of course, make it delightful so they don't want their money back.

Delighters work because they operate on the principle of surprise. Surprise is a rewarding experience in the brain. It's the foundation of comedy. We laugh when the sentence or situation doesn't turn out as expected. We laugh as much at our expectations and what reality produces. You must first understand your customers' expectations to unleash the power of delight.

### *Performance Needs*

When more is better and less is worse, we refer to it as a performance need. These are the easiest to meet because they are the easiest to articulate.

Most companies focus on competing on these needs. Because they are easy to articulate, see and compare, they attract our attention. We prefer things that are concrete and easy to explain. For that reason, you can get sucked into this dimension as the only dimension and risk becoming a commodity. It's a commodity when price is the only thing that causes customers to choose one over another.

Customers are promised these big promises and become upset when they don't materialize.

Because these attributes are straightforward to understand, there is no doubt in the customer's mind when they don't receive what they expected, as you promised. It happens a lot in every business; the key difference between those that thrive and those that don't is how you handle it. Are you handling complaints, refund requests, and negative feedback like they are gold? Or does it make you annoyed, frustrated, and irritated?

For instance, if you pay a courier to deliver your package by 8 a.m., they expect it to arrive at 8 a.m. We are usually okay with some leeway around that time, but consistency matters. Before aiming for a level of performance, ensure you can sustain it. Don't set yourself up for problems by setting your customers up for their hopes to be dashed.

### *Basic Needs*

The most complex needs to state are the ones we don't usually even realize we have. I wouldn't have learned I needed a coach who would respect me until I had one who didn't. I didn't know I expected my tap water to be apparent until the day it ran brown. Basic needs must be there; when they are, we take them for granted, but when they are not, we are very dissatisfied.

Sometimes, they are referred to as table stakes. Having the basics is the key to entering the market. If you have no market yet, you may have a gap in your ability to meet their basic needs. It may happen

within the first 7 seconds of meeting them, possibly due to a poor customer experience. At any time during the relationship, the customer will become very dissatisfied if their basic needs aren't met. Treat people respectfully, dress professionally and ensure you aren't making the conversation all about you.

Basic needs change over the lifetime of a relationship. You have to keep up. Microsoft introduced Clippy to assist users in answering their questions. Clippy made people downright angry. After much analysis and research, it was determined that users expected Clippy to act like a person. However, instead of building a memory of interaction and using that history to give more personalized answers, Clippy was brand new every time.

Ensure you are building and maintaining relationships, as they are the ones that determine pivotal outcomes for businesses.

## Pilot and Pivot to Perfection

Getting your service offering right, whether you've been in business for twenty years or less than one, is critical to a sales and service funnel that converts successfully. Now is a great time to step back and check what improvements you could make to make the difference between selling something and selling itself.

The first thing you don't know is what you are good at. You don't know because it comes naturally and easily to you. The things you think you are good at are the things where you are better than average, and then you work your butt off to become even better.

If you want to build a business based on working your butt off, then don't bother asking around to find out what you are uniquely good at. I think entrepreneurialism is hard enough. I'd instead build a business around what comes easily and naturally to me.

I want to demystify geniuses and convince everyone that what comes naturally and easily to them is their genius. Geniuses aren't just the Einsteins of the world who change our understanding of it. Even Einstein wasn't skilled in everything. He was uniquely suited for his thing.

The first round of questioning you want to cover in your market research is you. To build self-awareness, you must appreciate your innate talents and recognize your genius.

Get as specific as you can. You might be a gifted electrician, but what problems are a cakewalk for you when your colleagues or competitors are mired in quicksand? You won't know because you don't see them at work – you only see yourself. You must ask the people who initially hired someone else, then turned to you, or educators in your field who had you as a student. Consider who has the exposure and can tell you how you are unique and remarkable.

Once you know your genius, the next question is to discover who cares about it. I began my journey when my CEO asked me what I was doing differently from the other Black Belts, who were struggling to raise savings, while mine were increasing rapidly. Once I figured that out, I had to determine who was concerned. It might seem like a CEO would care, but mine was rare and remarkable enough that he wrote a book about his genius leadership style.

The people who care about what you offer might be a vastly different group than you might think. You will learn how to access them if you need to reach out to ask them questions. If you can't answer your questions, you will be unlikely to succeed with a sales call.

When you get it right, you know where they hang out. You will learn what they read and, therefore, where you can effectively market your business. Through your market research, you will establish contacts and connections you can leverage later when you have something to sell. It's the groundwork for the future.

### *Perfect Desire*

Now you know what you are good at, and who cares about that advantage? The next step is to learn what they want. Instead, we jump forward, thinking we know what they need. In truth, you likely know what they need, but people buy what they want, not what they need.

One parent told me about a workshop she'd attended when experiencing difficulty with her child. The workshop was entitled "Redirecting Your Child's Behaviour." They first learn that redirecting your child's behaviour requires the parent to change their behaviour. How many people would have signed up to redirect their behaviour?

It's human nature to want to change others but not ourselves. To be successful, you must package and position your message in a way that appeals to their wants, not their needs. Once they know you understand their wants, you can target their needs.

Go find out what people want, not what you think they need. You aren't looking for data to validate that they need what you offer; you are looking for what they want. When people want something, they find a way to afford it, get it, and have it. Just ask the credit card companies. When they know they need it but don't want it, they find ways to procrastinate, avoid it, and dismiss it. Just ask people who have home gyms being used as clothes racks.

Your sales process is greased to succeed when you know what they want.

### *Perfect Timing*

One definition of luck suggests that it occurs when preparation meets opportunity. There's no such thing as random luck. It's all about being prepared and recognizing opportunity. Opportunity knocks softly, but market research will help you increase the volume.

Your target has needs and wants, but they also have priorities. You must discover when their wants and needs align with your business's priorities to bring them to the top of their list. When you learn those conditions, you can recognize opportunities as they arise. And that's not all. When you understand what motivates it to the top of the priority list, you can help it get there more quickly.

We've all had moments when we had to shell out dearly for something we didn't see coming. These are squeeze moments. You've already invested in something, and to see it through to a conclusion, you must make a purchase you otherwise wouldn't have made.

For me, it happened when I produced my first online course. I'd spent weeks recording, preparing videos, and rallying people for the launch date. As I started uploading my first video, I experienced the start of the squeeze. Never having uploaded a video before, I was dismayed that it would take several hours. Calculating that the rate and the remaining videos would take several hours, I realized I would miss my launch date. I called and upgraded my internet provider package—the only way to make my deadline.

Somewhere between a nice-to-have future and a squeeze moment is the Goldilocks moment of perfect timing when your customer is happy to buy. Market research will help you discover what triggers that moment so you can nail your perfect timing pitch.

My internet provider could have popped a message on my screen saying, "Want to upload faster? Click here to upgrade your service." I would have clicked, and it would have saved a call. The reason wasn't just that it was perfect timing—it was in my language.

### *Perfect Research*

As you conduct your market research, you want to capture everything in their language. Instead, we transcribe it into words and phrases common to thinking and speaking. You might as well talk to your potential English-speaking customers in German when you fall into that trap.

When you can use their language in your sales copy, they immediately feel you understand them. People do business with those they know, like and trust. Using their words and phrases is a quick way to show you understand their wants and needs, that you share common ground, and that you are trustworthy.

Putting all this together leads to a hand-raising offer. You've something no one else has, which addresses their wants and needs when needed, and they can hear that. When they hear that, they raise their hands and say, "Yes, please!"

Conducting market research involves a lot of asking and listening without judgment. You network with curiosity, taking notes that are quotes, and you fill in the blanks of your knowledge while discarding your own opinions and assumptions along the way. Daniel J. Boorstin has said, "The greatest obstacle to discovery is not ignorance – it is the illusion of knowledge." Question what you think you know and do your market research.

## 3. The Sources of Creativity

In his TED talk, "Do Schools Kill Creativity," Sir Ken Robinson suggests that the education system has led you to overlook your creative genius. One of the first things he mentions is the extraordinary evidence of human creativity in all the presentations and all the people there. He contends that "creativity now is as important in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status."

I attended a Montessori school, renowned for its student-centred teaching approach. As a student, I needed to learn how to colour inside the lines and the importance of going in one direction. Fortunately, Picasso didn't attend Montessori. Twice, I failed this exercise until I learned how to press hard and

destroy her ability to evaluate my method. Then, I went to the easels to paint as I wanted. Fast-forward to high school, where I achieved the art award, and then went on to engineering school.

Four decades after my Montessori experience, I'm still attached to my experience of being wrong, of making mistakes in art class. If there's one class with no errors, it might be art. We need art now more than ever.

If you've made it through the education system, you must revive your creativity to make it in this world. Education killed it, but you need creativity now more than ever. Here's how to get the life back in your inner muse.

## Grow Value

When your business enters its slower cycle, it's the perfect time to consider new revenue streams. They take time to develop, and it's the ideal use of your time. In the past, you might have spent down cycles worrying that it might not pick up again. You may have doubled down on your promotional and marketing efforts. Instead, ease into the softening of work to prepare for predictable recovery and brand-new revenue streams.

Whenever we create a new revenue stream, we must ensure it will have value. Value is defined by what the customer is willing to pay for. If you make something they don't want, they won't buy it. If you price it for more than they are willing to pay, you have the same situation. Before creating anything, ensure you've done your market research to understand what they want and are willing to pay for it when you've got it ready.

## Expand Your Base

Value has two components. The first is the desired value, which is why we buy—it solves our problem. The second is perceived value, which happens after the purchase. Your goal is always to have perceived value higher than desired value. The opposite is called buyer's remorse.

In business, we work to reduce the barriers to desired value by offering risk-free refunds, discounts, and financing options. We also strive to enhance perceived value by delivering exceptional customer service, offering personalized bonuses, and providing exclusive future deals.

We replace our roofs not because it's fun and sexy but because we want to protect our most valuable asset. The need is emotional. The fear of water and wind damage affects the ability to sleep at night without a roomful of buckets collecting rainwater. It's logical that when your roof needs replacing, you do it; however, a rational approach will keep a new roof at the top of your list of priorities. When you connect with their emotional needs, you can move up that priority list and make it happen now.

Determine what emotional needs they are hoping to satisfy, and then allow them to justify the purchase with logical reasons.

### *Tap Side Knowledge*

DuPont, the chemical manufacturer that started with explosives, became known not just for its products but also for its safe practices. With other companies interested in manufacturing safely, DuPont entered the consulting business.

Remember that value isn't just financial. While you are in it for the profits, if not only for the profits, your customers are satisfying emotional needs before logical needs. No one likes to spend money on things we need, but we often enjoy spending money on things we want.

Korbett Miller, Owner of MMAA.com, a martial arts academy, attributes his success to the power of his systems. Enter his book **DE-MYTHIFY: FINDING FREEDOM IN YOUR SMALL BUSINESS**, an entirely different type of coaching practice.

### *Create Subscription Services*

Analyzing their past purchase history will enable you to contact them when they need a refill or when an add-on is appropriate. By getting to know your customers' work cycles, you can time opportunities to meet their needs.

How can you help your customers stay up-to-date or provide ongoing relevance? We live in an ever-changing world. Info products, such as magazine subscriptions, are easy to purchase, but consider a recurring daily, weekly, monthly, or yearly needs cycle. Products get used up, so think about offering recurring replacement packages.

Apps and software are major players in this arena, but providing your customers value doesn't have to be a significant investment. What are you currently using that you've designed and built specifically for your business?

Alternatively, what specific solution have you created that can be generalized to a broader audience? When you offer your customers information and knowledge, you are building relationships. No matter what your business is, it's a business of relationships.

### *Connect Customers*

Your customers have some commonalities which drive them to you, but you don't satisfy all their needs. Consider the products or services your customer needs and your own. To enhance your ice cream business, consider offering complementary products or services, such as sugar cones, insulated mugs, or party planning. What else do they need that is an extension of what you do? For instance, if you sell childcare services, you could host a parenting event and provide access to experts in childhood development, education, clothing, and nutrition.

None of this competes with your business, but it adds value to customers and could come with a price tag for admission. Other companies will have networks that are different from yours. When you work on an offering together, you leverage each other's resources and networks in a three-way, mutually beneficial way.

If you use and rely on specific products, consider contacting them to negotiate an affiliate deal. Under this deal, you get a portion of the proceeds for any sale made through you. Portions range widely. You may rely on certain service providers, such as your website developer or bookkeeper. When there is a match between your customers and their ideal customers, why not refer them? If the referral translates into new business, it's worth a financial thank-you.

If you want to make a million dollars, create something that costs one dollar and that a million people need. Take what you are selling and think smaller, quicker, and cheaper. Ensure it differs from your premium main products to avoid confusing price anchors. Think of it more as an introductory exchange. It's a chance for them to test your value proposition and an opportunity for you to learn more about why people buy from you.

Focusing on getting to know and understand your customers and their needs, finding ways to improve their lives, and implementing these changes will help you grow your business efficiently and effectively.

## Be Wrong Sometimes

According to Robinson, if you are not prepared to be wrong, you will never come up with anything original. We stigmatize mistakes, and that kills creativity.

Education emerged to serve industrialism. Industrialism doesn't value creativity; it prioritizes obedience, quantification, and productivity. Math and science get to take the top rank in the hierarchy of subjects, and thank goodness, the correct answers in those subjects aren't a matter of teacher discretion. We are supposed to learn to repeat answers, not to question them. My teacher wanted to keep the kids busy and out of her hair for a while, and I was too efficient.

Robinson says, "Our education system has mined our minds like we strip-mine the earth for a particular commodity." And for the future, it won't serve us." Welcome to this future for which you are not prepared.

## Creativity as Essential

In her TED talk, "4 Lessons in Creativity," Julie Burstein says, "Creativity is essential to all of us, whether we're scientists, teachers, parents, or entrepreneurs."

For one, industrial jobs are becoming increasingly scarce. Entrepreneurialism and service are taking over. In these two ways to make a living, you must think and feel like a human being.

Shouldn't the system that delivers the final product change if the end game has changed? The problem with systems is that they involve many diverse stakeholders with varying opinions and agendas. It takes a disciplined effort and a long time to change. The system won't save us, especially if you've already matriculated.

Suppose the education system creates the wrong product for success today. In that case, it's up to each of us to reconnect with our source of creativity, to remember that conformity and obedience have led to atrocities, and to question lessons we learned that might be wrong.



Robinson concludes that “many highly-talented, brilliant, creative people think they’re not because the thing they were good at in school wasn’t valued or was stigmatized.” Losing touch with what makes you rare and remarkable isn’t a healthy place to be. Misplaced humility robs people of passion, joy, and a sense of value, while the rest of us lose out on whatever we don’t value.

What if times have changed, and whatever you had that wasn’t valued is precisely what we need now?

Strong communities rely on a diverse range of talent. Entrepreneurialism depends on brilliant, creative people to solve problems we don’t even know we are experiencing, problems that society is trying to teach us to accept as the status quo.

### *Discard Judgment*

We won’t have those solutions if we continue to stigmatize failure. When we mark things right or wrong, when we judge them, we crush creativity and give failure fuel. Failure is getting it wrong and not having the chance to correct it. Learning is the chance to correct it.

Nora Ephron, a successful writer and filmmaker known for films like **WHEN HARRY MET SALLY** and **YOU’VE GOT MAIL**, said that the only thing we learn from failure is that it can happen again. Yes, it can. It can happen to you. It happens to anyone and everyone who reaches high, tries hard, and pushes the envelope forward.

The reality that it can happen again can prevent you from trying again. Ephron has a few failures and knows what she’s talking about. The only way to avoid failure is not to try anything new, complex, or worthwhile. How’s that for dull, stale and lifeless?

Yet, if you noticed, we still refer to her as a success because one success is enough to make you successful. It doesn’t matter how many failures it took. If J.K. Rowling had given up after the first rejection, after the tenth rejection, we wouldn’t have Harry Potter.

You don’t have to fail to get to success. But if you’ve failed, you aren’t done until you’ve achieved success, which is worth the lessons from all your attempts. Failure is to quit.

### *Open Up to New Experiences*

As a result of endings and beginnings, you must face things you’ve never encountered. As adults, we often assume that we have reached the end of our learning. We’ve achieved a certain level of rank, mastery, or status, and that lends a particular pride that is now in question.

The truth, and more so today than ever, is that we are never done learning. Throw off the mantle of stodginess that adulthood brings. When you learn something new, no one expects you to be good at it. Maybe just yourself. Learning something new is a way to connect with your inner child – the one who knows how to laugh at yourself, play, and have fun.

Nothing is easy, but much is possible with effort, time and help. You may not be able to bounce back when “back” is no longer an option, but you can bounce onward and upward.

## Find Resiliency

Resiliency is the ability to return to the original form. What do you do when the original form is no longer an option? It's called post-traumatic growth, and it is an option.

The amusing thing about most Apple cart-upsetting situations is that the original form is destroyed. When we fail to appreciate that fact, we can be like Humpty Dumpty's men—tasked with finding the pieces, the glue, and the ability to hold them together. It's impossible and exhausting, destroying confidence, esteem, and competence. Holding on to returning to a previous version of anything can be more taxing than the original upsetting event.

Thankfully, groundbreaking scientists have some tools to share to complete that reparation work.

The first stage of grief is denial. This is the stage where we see and know the facts, yet we can explain them away. "They just don't get it," an entrepreneur will say when turned down repeatedly. Resilience isn't about acting like rubber and letting all the feedback that could help you bounce right off; it's about finding the nuggets you can use as you move forward.

The second stage is anger. While this intense emotion can be scary, the more you feel it, the more it will dissipate, and the more you will heal. The trick is to find safe avenues to let it in and process it. Underneath anger lies pain, and to heal the pain, you must go through the anger.

The third stage is bargaining. We get lost in a sea of "if only" and "what-ifs." We are often caught up in past decisions and plans rather than being present in the moment.

When we shift to the present, the fourth stage, depression, takes hold. Evolutionary psychologists propose that depression might be a problem-solving state. It's a period of lethargy and withdrawal, which might help create the conditions to get to the next stage.

Finally, there is acceptance. This isn't about being okay with how it happened; it's about recognizing that the new reality is permanent. There is no going back.

## Write it Your Way

Her son, Jacob Bernstein, produced the documentary "**EVERYTHING IS COPY**" ABOUT HIS MOTHER. The title comes from something Ephron's mom said all the time. Ephron says, "I now believe that what my mother meant was this: When you slip on a banana peel, people laugh at you. But when you tell people you slipped on a banana peel, it's your laugh, so you become a hero rather than the victim of the joke. I think that's what she meant. On the other hand, she may have merely meant that everything is copied.

When you tell your story, you get the laugh, and that's never a failure. Unleash your creative genius by writing your story and what you want to say to it. Be your author. Remember that you are still far from knowing how it will end. Those pages are up to you to fill. What will you create today? As Oprah says, "Failure is there to point you in a different direction."

Brain wiring makes us about twice as likely to be motivated to prevent a loss than we are to pursue pleasure. You may have experienced this illogical pull if you've ever lost something. It happens to everyone, even when aware of this irrational behaviour.

A loss isn't only material. We lose things like beliefs, identities, and relationships. While stuff can be replaced, it's what you can't see that matters. It's what you can't see that needs to be repaired, and that's often the perspective you use to understand the situation.

### *Tell a New Story*

Deliberate rumination is a stage that makes or breaks growth. When we get trapped by our old narratives, we miss the opportunity to grow from the experience. We need a new storyline; it takes time to figure out how to recast ourselves as the hero on a different journey.

The temptation is to cast yourself as a victim. Something happened, and it wasn't fair. It certainly shouldn't have happened to you. As a victim in your story, you will not find the power you need to transform.

Alternatively, we can cast ourselves as martyrs. As someone who willingly sacrifices for the benefit of others or something else, we also fail to take personal responsibility for changing our circumstances.

As a saint, you tell your story as someone who did nothing wrong and could not have been responsible for this situation. While randomness rules our lives, sticking with a saint story will undermine your power.

Post-traumatic growth requires telling a new story that accepts and puts the latest facts in perspective. Most powerfully, it helps you recognize that what you might perceive as an ending is, in fact, a new beginning. New beginnings are full of new potentials that you may not realize. While one door closes, it's only after you stop looking at that door that you realize there are others.

### *Igniting Fresh Thoughts*

When was the last time you did something for sheer enjoyment? We are living faster lives, becoming increasingly work-focused, and seeking ways to be more productive; however, leisure and downtime are worth pursuing.

Taking time to focus on enjoyable activities gives you a break from life's stressors and relieves boredom in a way that re-energizes you. Studies at the National Cancer Institute have shown that leisure activity can increase life span by more than four years. If the time you spend your life on leisure activities could add up to four years, then that's practically free time.

Do you get your most significant breakthroughs in the shower? When you are engaged in a mundane activity, you distract the conscious mind without taxing the brain. This allows you to get deep insight into a complex problem. Leisure pursuits can help you make progress with your non-leisure pursuits.

There's a famous anecdote about such an experience. Archimedes faced the complex problem of determining whether the king's crown was solid gold or a mixture of inferior metals. He couldn't damage the crown in the process. He toiled away and without luck. Then, one day, as he stepped into the bathtub and saw the water level rise, he realized he could use buoyancy. Comparing the displacement of the crown to that of a sample, he determined the goldsmith was indeed a fraud.

## Enlist Support

Numerous studies have demonstrated that perceived control benefits mental and physical health. It enhances resilience, motivation, cognitive function, and overall life satisfaction. According to the 2013 World Happiness Report, it's one of the six pillars of life satisfaction.

Increases in personal control can satisfy a need to feel competent and masterful. People feel better about accomplishments when they can attribute positive results to themselves.

Planning increases your sense of control and life satisfaction, which improves with age. Life planners slow down later in life, but it comes at the cost of their happiness.

Men tend to be more long-term oriented, while women focus more on the near term. Women have to-do lists, while men typically have five—and ten-year plans.

Social groups make people feel good and help them feel capable and in control of their lives. We are motivated to perform better when we feel more powerful.

When we believe what others tell us about ourselves, we set ourselves up for disasters. In one study, smokers were led to believe they had either high or low self-control and then were asked to resist smoking as a test of that self-control.

The group said they had high self-control and chose to expose themselves to more temptation, thinking they could resist. Ultimately, the high group failed three times as often as the low group.

Control seems to stem from two sources: interpersonal and personal. When control is interpersonal, scholars refer to it as power, whereas choice is considered intrapersonal. Related but serving a common purpose, power and choice are substitutable. We are happy to give up an option if it gives us interpersonal power and are equally excited to give up control if it results in more choices.

Scientists willing to embrace abstraction and see how it might happen and be true will always find ways to proceed. They develop machinery and tools, protocols and experiments, and delve into the world of the abstract, much like a patron of the Museum of Modern Art explores the collections of Kandinsky, Pollock, and Picasso.

## Rely on Others

Community and support are vital for change. Being grateful for the people in your life who show up for you and can help is a reliable path to post-traumatic growth.

Asking for help is like a superpower. There is the fear of rejection, and you have to expose a vulnerability. It's a superpower not just because it's challenging to do but because the results are incredible when you do. People are inherently driven to help others. When you are asked for help, how do you feel? I feel flattered and willing, and I bet you do, too.

You may not have to ask. It might come anyway. When that's the case, your challenge is to accept it. Let them in and take any proffered assistance. Accepting help doesn't weaken you – it strengthens your support systems.

Women are more likely than men to achieve post-traumatic growth because they are more apt to express and share their emotions. Note that expressing and sharing are two different things. Simple writing exercises have been proven effective. Writing out your feelings and thoughts helps you find the words you need. You don't have to share this with anyone. It can be just for yourself, and that goes a long way toward your post-traumatic growth.

The point is to investigate the emotion. Why do you feel that way? Where does this notion originate, and is it still relevant? You might discover faulty assumptions and old opinions that no longer serve you.

As a fact of new beginnings, some things that weren't previously possible are now possible. Finding the positive in whatever has happened can be difficult, but there are silver linings in every cloud if you are willing to be open and creative enough to find them.

For those who have experienced post-traumatic growth, the positive is finding a new community that needs your help. You've come a long way, and others behind you haven't yet come that far. What can you teach, tell, or do for them because of your experience and expertise? Helping others heal helps heal yourself.

### *Raise the Bar*

In too many ways, we are like elephants. We have great memories, but unfortunately, those great memories can backfire.

When elephants are young, a trainer uses a heavy chain around their ankle to keep it in place. Quickly, they learn that they cannot go anywhere. Later, you see a full-grown elephant with a thin rope holding him in place. Of course, the rope is nothing to the animal now, but the feeling on the ankle and the great memory of what that feeling means is enough—enough to have learned to stop trying.

From birth, the brain is programmed to function, shaping life based on how people interact with you. At a fundamental level, your parents and family likely influenced your preferences, beliefs, and ideas as you grew up.

As babies, we can't help but draw conclusions that make no sense, like 'I must be cute to get attention.' Then, there is the adult who wants more time to pursue a new goal and doesn't recognize ninety minutes spent grooming could be repurposed. Or there's Hillary Rodham Clinton, who bemoans the chair and sits in it for hours anyway.

You can inspect what went wrong as a child and directly attack the need to preen. The problem with correcting early years is that most of us don't remember them, and recalling them might do more damage than good. You can also notice how you spend your time, evaluate your current costs and benefits, and decide if that reflects your current priorities.

### *Take the High Road*

Alicia Keys has been makeup-free since 2012. On Oprah's Masterclass series, she said the best advice was to stay busy. Imagine how much more time the star has to pursue goals—not the ones society would impose on her if it got its way.

Analyzing our histories can produce tremendous insights into our lives. Psychologists agree that the first five years of a child's life are crucial. During this time, unfiltered brain wiring occurs—unfiltered, meaning it is based on raw, unprocessed experiences.

Later, we might enter therapy because we tend to overeat. We learn that it may be because food was withheld as children, so our experience with hunger taught us that eating as much as possible when the chance arises is an effective strategy.

Throwing up your hands or blaming your parents isn't practical. There will be many times when the root cause doesn't matter. Instead, take accountability and be willing to answer the question, "What will you do about it now?"

The Mischel experiments found that preschoolers who could wait for a second marshmallow experienced success. Initially, the conclusion was about the power to delay self-gratification. However, what if it was an expression of the circumstances the children were already experiencing, which was independent of self-control?

### *Debug the Program*

The children who snapped up the first marshmallow might have had a worldview in which that automatic action was the brightest possible. In their world, people were untrustworthy (A second one? Yeah, right, I might never see you again.).

A kid that snaps it up might have more siblings than resources. Being fast is a survival skill in that situation. Another might have been duped by adults before, and knowing not to trust a future that may not manifest is a skill we all need to learn at some point. Yes, it's sad if a child already knows that people and life will let him down, that parents aren't perfect, and that neither is all of the advice on which they rely.

A child can do little about the life circumstances surrounding him except adopt a survival strategy. At some point, survival gets upgraded, but not everyone gets the opportunity. To call them unsuccessful is a shame on society.

The short version is that we are all influenced by emotions and events outside our memories or perceptions. The extended version is that we are gifted with the ability to re-write that programming. You are programmed, and at 18, magically, you are responsible for everything, including the bugs.

Metacognition is the ability to tune into what you are thinking, why that would be so, and what you want to do about it before anything noticeable happens on the outside. It starts by learning how to doubt that voice. Not everyone does. People who experience relatively ordinary lives and live in regular routines, with sufficient acceptance, tend to go with the flow and adapt to their surroundings. There's nothing wrong with that unless there is.

Respect for authority is often confused with putting it on a pedestal and never questioning it. Critical thinking isn't something most parents teach. It requires a significant amount of time, patience, and commitment. Instead, parents teach kids the shortcuts. Do what I tell you, they say. It is quite different from teaching them how to make decisions independently.

Doing the latter means you are done one day. Doing the former means you must do it forever because conditions constantly change. When you nurture a skill, there is a point at which you are no longer needed. This is why some parents don't teach skills but instead focus on training obedience.

## Slow Down

While Lean Manufacturing advises scheduling a machine at 8 percent of full capacity, it's human nature to expect more than 100 percent of its potential. Yet, when you aim for eighty, there are fewer scheduling problems and fewer excuses.

Taking time off sometimes gets a bad rap, but it can pay off in spades. It almost seems like individuals are competing to work the most hours, sleep the least, and squeeze productivity out of every moment of the day. Yet, there is a limit; when we observe it, we can be far more productive after taking the time off.

Ambitious executives often boast about how many hours they spend in the office. Workweeks of 70 or more are standard; doctors typically work significantly more extended hours.

However, a study conducted at Stanford University by John Pencavel found the sweet spot to be 50 hours. He discovered that the output at 70 hours differed little from the output at 56 hours, meaning those extra 14 hours were better spent on something else.

Those who work longer hours aren't just wasting their time and shortening their lives and productive years. They risk developing health problems, lack sleep, and fail to establish social support networks. Burnout is a common issue that can take years to recover from; for some, it may not be possible.

Your workweek is the first area where you should start taking time off. If you regularly clock in more than 50 hours, you may not be as productive as you think.

## *The Gain in Distance*

Have you ever been stuck on something and switched tasks only to experience the flash of insight you needed? Sometimes, we need to give the unconscious brain the time to work on the problem. Perhaps you need a whole night or just a few minutes to sleep on it.

Dijksterhuis and his colleagues asked 80 students to choose the best car from a set of four to test the mind's ability to work on information while consciously focusing on something else.

The researchers had previously ranked them based on size, mileage, maneuverability and other features. Half had four minutes to make their choices after reviewing all the information; the other half were distracted by anagrams.

Those who spent time focusing on the information performed worse than those who considered the information unconsciously.

Marcus Raischle of Washington University in Saint Louis and his colleague demonstrated a particular set of scattered brain regions that only fire in synchrony when you are at rest. After many confirming

studies by other researchers, this circuit was named the default mode network, or DMN. It's not the only network that activates when resting – at least four others do.

Daydreaming helps us affirm our identities. It's when we replay earlier conversations and imagine how we'd rewrite them to learn from the past and prepare for the future. We practice how we might approach difficult situations.

When we daydream, we develop our understanding of human behaviour and instill an inner code of ethics. We reflect on why someone behaved the way they did with empathy and compassion and can search for what motivated that behaviour.

Or, with pain and judgement, we can decide that's not how we want to treat others and examine if we have wronged anyone.

We leaf through our mental to-do lists and half-finished projects, reflecting on our priorities. We recall childhood memories and imagine alternative futures. It's our opportunity to determine who we are, who we want to be and how we might get there.

### *The Value of Vacation*

Are you taking all your vacation days? In America, Canada, Japan, and the Netherlands, we average 10 days of vacation entitlement per year. A survey by Harris Interactive found that at the end of 2012, Americans had an average of nine unused vacation days. Are you only taking one day off per year?

Using vacation time leads to higher productivity, stronger workplace morale, less stress, and greater employee loyalty. Some companies even offer unlimited vacations.

In several surveys, Americans have admitted to obsessively checking and responding to emails or feeling obligated to get some work done on vacation. How relaxing is that?

In competitive cultures, being out of the loop can mean missing opportunities to get ahead. We also fear that things will spiral into a massive problem if we miss the chance to nip it in the bud.

Pressing pause effectively takes planning and preparation. Maybe the best time to do it is when the boss is doing it, too. Setting up your autoresponder with the right interim contacts might help you step away with more confidence. Before committing, consult with your major stakeholders to determine if any issues are on their radar. Do the work before stepping away; stepping back can be much easier.

### *The Case for Sleep*

Sleep is the most basic form of downtime, yet many executives report only sleeping 5-6 hours. New parents are chronically exhausted. As many as 30 percent of students from kindergarten to grade twelve don't get enough sleep at night. These groups and others who aren't getting a solid night's sleep undermine their ability to form and consolidate memories.

Numerous studies have confirmed that memory is closely tied to sleep. When sleeping, your brain cycles through different phases of sleep, including light sleep, deep sleep, and rapid eye movement (REM) sleep.



Dreaming occurs during REM sleep. These cycles repeat approximately every 90 minutes. Non-REM stages prime the brain for learning the next day. Without adequate sleep, your ability to learn could drop off as much as 40 percent.

Memories stabilize during deep sleep. After that, in REM, related memories seem to be linked. REM action helps explain why problem-solving improves with a whole night's rest.

Processing emotional memories during REM sleep can reduce the intensity of emotions and help you understand what might be happening in your dreams. Remembering and paying attention to dreams can help you gain new insights.

Whether it's a better night's sleep, a vacation, or some time spent daydreaming, take some time to press pause and allow yourself to recharge.

Many of us procrastinate on our leisure activities, thinking we'll take them up again when we retire. Many retired individuals are far busier in retirement than during their working years. If you procrastinate, you may find that you don't have time to do them either.

No matter how busy you are or how important the tasks on your to-do list are, you will benefit from taking a break and engaging in relaxing, mundane activities. Take some time just for the fun of it.

## Shift Perspective

A creative mindset is essential for any knowledge worker, yet many believe creativity is reserved for artists, actors, and other creative professionals.

I knew I wasn't a musician early. By high school, I realized that the phrase "starving artist" might be in my future, and I made sacrifices in my course choices for more fulfilling career options. But by the time I graduated with my engineering degree, I knew my creativity skills were serving me well.

To set you straight, this isn't about Creativity; it's about creativity. Capital Creativity might describe the genius of Einstein, whose thought experiments led to his famous equation. Instead, this is about lower-case creativity. Edward de Bono defines this as "breaking out of established patterns to look at things differently." That everyone needs.

Creativity is required for problem-solving. A unique perspective is needed for everything, from the challenge of a triple integral to grocery shopping on a limited budget.

Innovation couldn't exist without it, as it is the act of implementing that creativity.

Resilience requires creativity because sometimes established patterns change without our intervention, and we must find a different way of seeing things. How fast you can adapt depends on your creativity. With the rapid rate of change affecting us, creativity is becoming increasingly critical.

## Get Smaller

Narrow the scope. While we are asked to think outside the box, as if there are no boundaries, the vast space is too difficult to contemplate, and a world without constraints is unrealistic. Necessity, they say, is the mother of invention. Identify your constraints and start there. To understand the power of this

solution, take 30 seconds to list everything in white. Now, wait 30 seconds and list everything white in your fridge. While the options for the second list are far shorter, you will likely find that your second list is longer.

Think backward. Instead of thinking of how to get to where you want to go from where you are, try standing at the finish line and looking back at how you got there. You may research how others have achieved their goals for inspiration, but remember that their starting point isn't the same as yours. Focus on how you got there. What's true for them may not be accurate for you, and vice versa. Make it your own.

Please take it to extremes. Enlarge the size to its maximum or shrink it down to microscopic. Return to the troglodytes or generations past. Imagine a zero-budget scenario and what you could accomplish with unlimited resources.

More choices make it more challenging to make a choice, and we often don't make a choice. We seek comparisons to contextualize the choice when presented with only one option. Avoid this pitfall by providing three related packages, expecting most users to opt for the middle option. Describe the higher-priced options to set their anchor points high, then wow them with the exceptional value of the deal.

### *Get Imaginative*

Change history. Memory is only what we choose to replay, tainted by exposure, suggestion and personality, and history is just the recorded story. If you've ever returned to a childhood playground, you'll likely be struck by the realization that you remember it much more vividly. When memory is unreliable, look backward at what might have gone differently than you thought and what you missed the first time.

Use a different sense. We are all directed toward one reason, which dominates our choice of words, such as "I see what you mean" versus "I hear what you are saying" or "That smells fishy" versus "That doesn't feel right." Sight versus sound, and smell versus touch. Identify yours and pick a different one as you brainstorm.

When my boyfriend gave me a sled for Christmas years ago, I laughed at the precocity. I was no snowmobiler. I was a snowboarder if it snowed and a cross-country skier if it was about appreciating nature. I was so wrong.

Giving it a chance, I went to purchase gear. The friendly neighbourhood chain helped outfit me, and I left feeling happy and prepared. He knew I was embarking on learning to ride, and he helped me through every decision, wishing me well.

After my first ride, I couldn't wait to take off my jacket, which was 20 degrees below zero. Overheated with exertion, I spent lunch rehydrating and cooling down.

Use both sides of the brain. Verbal rules are left, and pictures rule right. Leafing through magazines, even those unrelated to the topic, will spark new thoughts. Mind mapping with pen and paper and visualization exercises will allow the right brain to contribute, where it is usually the left that takes

charge. If you've ever come up with a ground-breaking idea while brushing your teeth, thank the task for occupying your left brain and letting your right get an idea in.

### *Get Limitless*

Eventually, there came a time when I needed to pass someone. The rule was to follow, and if I go, you go. Stay together. It was always well-planned, and I executed it as well as possible. I'd come to expect a smooth pass.

When my boots needed replacing, I wondered why I needed boots rated for -90 °C when one foot was beside the muffler and one was beside the clutch. Not places where you feel the elements. If the only boots offered for women were these, where did they expect women to be riding?

Then, maybe three or four times, the person we'd passed decided to change their speed. I've seen drivers on the highway do it in anger, and I've done it myself when people cut me off or coat me in a spray of sludge, but that was a good, clean pass.

What was happening?

I asked for an opinion. Boys don't like to be passed by a girl. Men are okay with it and respect the woman, but boys are boys.

When the muscles I'd built in my legs and arms squashed the padding, I now needed to ride longer and in more unforgiving conditions, and I decided to choose differently. It was better to look like a man and not poke the boys.

Re-frame the problem. If you can't find a solution, you may not be working on the right problem. Disabling issues are those that over-specify a solution, such as defining what and how, such as, 'I want to fly by flapping my arms.' Get precise and accurate about the problem, and you may end up headed in a new direction.

### *Seek Rejection*

I never thought I'd buy Skidoo, but it came more than once. The first time, I rode a sled, which was one generation older than my buddy's. When my weak link revealed itself to be my thumb, I asked for a break, indicating my thumb needed the rest. "Oh, you should try mine. It's fuel-injected, whereas with yours, you're manually injecting the gas with your thumb. I test-drove the truth and placed my order.

The second time, the upgrade was because I'd worn out everything there was to wear out. My buddy told me about when they received a letter from the manufacturer indicating that their definition of "recreation" was far below the usage indicated by the odometer on his sled. As such, the warranty would not be valid. With sadness, a deal was arranged on a trade-in, and when we dropped it off, the dealer said, "Lady driven, my ass." I guess I was no lady.

The third time was a repetition of the second, and the fourth a repetition of the first. "Brakes? Why didn't someone tell me?" All that time, they'd be advertising the turbo, and I'd been unimpressed, thinking that I'd ample speed, thank you.

When my sled was acting problematic, I tried the turbo and discovered, for the first time, the ability to brake. Historically, the brake only stopped the track from spinning, and the sled would turn into a crazy carpet toboggan, or to me, a snowboard with a motor. It was an easy sell with a brake and a sled showing wear. Why didn't they say so, I wondered?

I wondered if they thought improving the brakes would be better because people can go fast. But if I can brake then watch how fast I can go. It's a whole new world awaiting.

## Sanction Freedom

One year, Skidoo launched a feedback form to solicit ideas. I happily submitted it, although my buddy told me not to bother. He provided them with specific specifications and materials when it was his turn.

According to him, they responded that it would be too expensive to make, so they aren't going to.

Sadly, he looked at the letter they sent snail mail with finality and told me that he would have paid whatever the price. Since then, I've met many others who would have, and I've yet to obtain a serial number past forty. How many customers did they need, I wondered?

During my time in the automotive industry, I developed cost models to determine the final prices of products, breaking down one-time costs and costs per unit to arrive at a required sales price. I can tell you that far more money was paid to people and managers than ever went into a box. Sometimes, the box is the most expensive part that the customer sees. However, my skills should focus on less than ten percent of the cost and how to make that cheaper. A couple of cents on a bolt went a long way, but don't mention how eliminating a few middlemen could make the thing half the price. That's not OEM.

What rules do you operate under or within? Some you can identify and know are self-imposed, but what if you let anyone say anything, and you can sort among the ones to which you must conform and the ones you had no idea were limiting you?

People can say the darndest things when you let them. If you do not want to hear the feedback, then find a way to insulate the giver of the feedback from the possible blowback.

## Manage Development

As in the automotive industry, well-known and communicated standards that an investment needs to achieve can help people identify opportunities and what is not worth their time.

The investment you are willing to make toward innovation may be measured in various ways, but the only factual return on that investment is zero. Expect nothing. Expect to get nothing. This is the only way to spark the creativity achievable. Setting a minimum target introduces stress, and stress kills creativity.

Minimums can refer to the number of hours someone spends working each week. You can decide how to spend that time, confining and defining it as appropriate to your comfort level; it need not be a complete clean slate of nothingness. Perhaps they spend time with a different department, a consumer group, or conducting market research. It's up to you and what you hope to unleash.

According to Tom Wujec, managing the iterative process is the key to success. To iterate means to go through the same steps, make a slight adjustment as a result of those steps, and repeat the process. It gathers customer feedback on versions one and two until the beta version becomes the final launch version.

Along the way, learn how to make the process work more effectively and produce more consequential outputs.

### *Create Communities*

A community of experts can shed light on what's next in product development as you seek to push the envelope forward, but don't neglect the other directions. A community of Luddites might help you identify opportunities to roll back technology, creating a more traditional or hands-on experience that appeals to its user group.

Instead of seeking feedback from a diverse group, shared commonality helps give rise to the voice that might otherwise be lost among the most charismatic, loudest, or transparent speakers in the room. Silence has might when you find it and finally gives voice to a latent undercurrent of unrest. Solve that unrest, and you are golden.

People with great ideas often stay silent for various reasons. When surrounded by people who share this mistaken behaviour assumption, they can't help but chime in. Listen to what no one else is bothering to tune in to.

If luck is the fortunate meeting of opportunity and preparation, being surrounded by the right people with the right problem at the right time can be the perfect storm to catalyze rare insights. Experts are predictably wrong, management is ultimately personal, and leadership is asking directly, without the chain of the telephone game.

The best advice I'd ever received might have been that the operators make or break anyone's success. If you see yourself as their resource, you have the right idea. You are doomed to be corrected if you see yourself as their authority.

I had one boss throughout my career. Later, VPs told me the number of people who "worked for them." I immediately understood the nature of the gap I was being asked to solve. I've worked in the same direction as others, reported to people, and been an employee, but I've always worked for myself.

I've met mothers who work for their children, fathers who work for their families, and students who work for their education. Some immigrants work for their permanent residency, academics work for their tenure, and entrepreneurs work for their egos. There seem to be millions of reasons to work, but to further an employer's agenda has never ranked.

### *Align Agendas*

I heard a secret truth: If you stay, they will tell you what job to take, and sometimes that will include where you will move. One day, if there is nowhere to go in the organization's plans, you will be out and

have technical expertise that is no good anywhere else. If you are ever going to leave, do it now, while the getting out is good and the jumping seamless.

Jumping was the only option for someone pursuing the ultimate freedom. The timing was evident, and the only thing I cared about in the landing was the location: not Toronto.

If you google “not Toronto,” guess what you get? I used up my limited vacation days and took the least bad option. It’s not the worst way to make decisions. Letting them be made for you can be far worse. Letting each day go by on a sure path to regrets is another worse way. Giving up now, giving in now, settling for someone else’s dreams, and dictating my destiny was too early, and yet, was I measuring that right? If I wouldn’t now, when would I? Why did those who gave in and gave up do so?

I asked every career man I could find, but since I couldn’t find career women, I didn’t ask any.

Yes, where were the career women? That was the exact question I wanted answered. I looked up to Oprah and her self-mastery. She wrote her pay cheques, owned her own homes, and I don’t even know her last name, but I do know she’d never take someone else’s or the seat behind them. Martha Stewart had my secret dream job; the one’d been shamed for wanting. Oh, to be a homemaker with choices! If not until retirement, there will be a day, and now I’m coming for you!

I decided not to marry DuPont. I might have said my oath to engineering and donned the appropriate ring, but I draw a line when the other guy doesn’t seem to notice that I have my ambitions and ideas. I dreamed of an equal partnership steeped in mutual respect and the fair pursuit of needs. If I had never fantasized about weddings, I would not have known what I wanted in a marriage.

When I told the intern I was leaving, I remembered that even the interns have to be wise to get in here, but they don’t have to be full of assumptions about it. “Where are you going to go? NASA?” he asked.

My response was to walk away and ponder what that meant. You never appreciate what you have until it’s gone, especially when you have no comparison. How do you know this is as good as it gets? However, suspecting that’s what he might have meant, I was too unchallenged, too idealistic, and too young to accept likely truths without finding out for myself.

Such is how you leave heaven willingly: on a misguided hope and the faith of a prayer.

## Thrive in Disruption

If they wanted to pin the Challenger disaster on the engineer who failed to make management understand the data correctly, I wanted to learn everything I could about message delivery and scapegoating. I did have a lot to learn about the finesse of sharing the conclusions, including the part that if you present your findings wrong, nothing you found matters.

This isn’t about them, or their story, or even mine. It’s about you and what matters today to create an organization that is doing great things in significant ways and will continue to do so for generations to come.

People have to face personal improvement as much as they have to face owning up to the problems in their lives and being accountable for being the problem-solver. The only way forward is to create a new option. Maybe even a third dimension.

These spectrums exist in many places where we see only black and white, right or wrong, learned or innocent. One thing that went wrong, not a pile of lessons paid for with experience, no matter how things turned out.

### *Finding New Dimensions*

Sometimes, there is even a third dimension that breaks the whole thing into a triangle instead of a mere line. Maybe a rainbow breaks out where there were previously only two. As Martin Luther King Jr said, “The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends towards justice.” I don’t know about justice, but it does seem to bend toward increased freedom and equality. Not win/lose, not even win/win, but a bigger pie when we bake together.

In the economy, organizations provide a place for employees to learn, develop, and contribute. They also offer customers things to improve their lives, albeit for a price. They also give investors opportunities to grow their money while they sleep.

Like many businesses, organizations borrow money, use it, and then pay it back. They pay more when they pay it back, which is called interest. As they use that money, they make a profit, which is what is left over after all the bills are paid.

The extraordinary and durable organization treats all three stakeholders like they matter. Usually, you know to put your money in one, work for a different one, and still shop elsewhere. You want your investments to grow, your perks to be enviable, and your prices to be affordable.

Ford wanted his employees to be able to afford his cars, and that wasn’t supposed to mean a steep employee discount. Today’s customer doesn’t like most of the purchase price to go toward your pension fund. While everyone shops at Walmart, the idea of a last-ditch effort at being an employee is to be the greeter.

Choose one or two, or balance all three for longevity. Things change and grow. Knowing what to leave behind is one way to stand the test of time. Leaving or going is not always easy, but success isn’t about making everyone happy—it’s about knowing how to make things happen and when. Extraordinary and durable organizations don’t merely thrive in disruption; they create it because they change by design.

### *Engaging Thinkers*

Root cause analysis involves starting with symptoms and working through timelines and systems. When I learned this approach, it wasn’t so much about learning the approach as it was about knowing what to call what I’d always been doing.

Today, managers are taught to “go-see” and “manage by walking around,” but they don’t know what they are looking for or why they are there. Still, they go through the motions and check the boxes.

When we are good little students, we go through the motions and check the boxes without realizing it. We listen to our teachers, absorb every word, and accurately and precisely reflect what’s expected.

It’s another thing when you have to figure it out for yourself and arrive at the lesson the long way around. The latter synthesized the knowledge; the former merely ingested the information.

At Dupont, information was shared freely. This impression has, at least, stood the test of time and experience, from corporate strategies and challenges to my mentors' mistakes and regrets.

Feedback was also freely shared when and where it was relevant. Later, I would find that every other organization saves it all up for a once-a-year event fraught with miscommunication and emotional confusion. Yes, I don't need those performance reviews.

Open and transparent communication- please keep it flowing, for you can never calculate the return on investment of that stuff.

### *Knowing the Markets*

One day, the corporate lesson went back decades. They were going through a rebrand, and they explained their approach to such things. I've since learned that MBAs rarely get to put their education into this context to make it all make sense. When you know it because you are living it, you synthesize the information like no classroom can.

Growth happens through investors and the stock market. Companies that need more money to buy equipment borrow from the market. The market decides how much it will provide and at what rate. Great companies keep their word, making investors happy. Falling short could hurt not just financially but also your reputation and future costs. All investors ever want is more, so growth happens.

Growth follows a predictable curve. Take an "S," hold the bottom end, and drag the top out until the whole thing moves forward. Along the bottom part of the curve, growth is slow and flat, then the pace picks up before flattening off again.

It's a curve that describes growth in a petri dish because of the introduction of the limits. The dish has only so much medium, so eventually, it's all gone. Markets are similar. First, some catch on and get it. Then, demand and your ability to meet it go lockstep until you hit a constraint. Maybe there are no longer workers, materials, or customers, but there is an end, and you should know what you will do when you get there.

With carpet, people preferred hardwood, even those whose livelihoods depended on it. With airbags, there was also going to be an end. After you are in every car, where do you go? Okay, where do you go after you are in every side door, B column, roof, and bumper?

Where do the jobs go when the corporate taxes, wages and pensions, and political demands get too high? Like water, it will always find the lowest ground.

### *Support Teams*

As we learned in Houston, part of the role of a Black Belt is to educate and convert others. Since my hands were full and no one was pushing or pressuring me, I avoided adding extra work and excessive effort to my plate.

Everyone else recruited a team. They called meetings, completed all the paperwork and templates, and produced minutes.



Teams weren't my thing. I studied on my own in university and never figured out how to share my thoughts with someone without handing them over or giving them up completely.

Since I had enough to learn, I postponed the team leadership and project management lessons.

When my CEO called me to ask me what I was doing differently, I panicked. I thought I was being called out for violating this cultural expectation. As he explained the genesis of his question, I realized I could keep the status of my team leadership skills to myself.

Instead, I told him of my history of working in the same area. I knew most Black Belts had been re-assigned to different manufacturing lines or divisions, whereas I didn't even move office. Perhaps that's about all I revealed.

### *Leverage All Knowledge*

Today, I know the key to my success was in the different way I used a team. I didn't have to recruit a team because I was still surrounded by people I thought of that way, regardless of roles or titles. I spent my budget to reward my team members with gift certificates. I handed them out to people who answered my questions, made time for my interrogations, and offered me anonymous information. "If anyone asks, tell them you were on my team."

That's how I lead – from behind and in the shadows, and don't tell me it doesn't work. It's been the way of women forever, if it's also prone to shadiness and frustration.

Yes, asking for help is not fun – if you only do it when needed. You are vulnerable when you cannot take no for an answer when you need something. Asking is akin to the porcupine rolling over on its back and presenting you with its belly. With that image in mind, you can bet I'll never ask for help when needed.

Instead, the key to success is to ask for help. Period, full stop. It's not about whether you need or want it; it's about sharing. Problems are fun to solve, and if you hog them all to yourself, it's like throwing yourself a birthday party and eating all the cake yourself.

Allowing people to be part of something embeds success because everyone wants to be successful. The more people you can involve and tie their success to it, the better off you might be. It's how you build relationships and connections because everything is not what you know; it's who you know.

You need people, and people love to help. Give people a chance to help you.

### *Get Beyond Stereotypes*

Vases have a purpose beyond holding dead flowers, and I'm sure every artist who makes one doesn't see them in that light. When I achieved my Black Belt certification, they told me I would get a vase but a Leatherman for everyone else.

Thankfully, my boss intervened and got me the tool instead. He saved me from that horrific experience they would have called an award. I got my Leatherman, just like everyone else.

It's a good thing because I had no idea what to do with a vase and no notion that inclusion and diversity would see me treated as a woman first and only last, as the engineer I worked to become. Why should birth overrule effort? Why should one person be treated differently?

I believe someone intervened when they had no idea, but they were working on another assumption about who I was and what I wanted. Instead, I applaud people who do their homework before acting on behalf of someone else because diversity and inclusion only happen when you stop shoving people into easy categories and convenient boxes.

My boss knew I spent every vacation in Algonquin Park or painting pictures alone, so yes, a pocket knife would be handier than a shirt pocket. Can women get those, too?

Society likes their women pretty, small, and quiet. I don't care if I'm pretty or not, although I think it's fun to paint my face. I did learn that I am shorter than I thought, although I don't know why they wanted me to realize it. I'm capable of withholding my words, and I did learn that that's not the same as being quiet.

Stereotypes kick in when we've done just a little bit of homework. Oh, those engineers are so cold and calculating. Stereotype. True most of the time, and with broad strokes, but not necessarily valid for any individual. They all have hearts; they put them in boxes and buried their emotions long ago.

If you have difficulty finding a softly skilled engineer, you might just as difficult a time finding a well-adjusted comedian. We choose our professions by feel as much as by logic—perhaps for everyone but engineers.

### *Inform Choices*

The bane of my existence as a Black Belt was not having enough work to do. This provided ample opportunity to look around and notice what everyone else was doing.

When I was invited to present my projects to the leadership team, instead of leaving directly after my presentation, I indicated I was fine waiting until the next break—you know, so as not to disrupt anyone. I sat at the back and opened my eyes.

I cannot say what was deliberate or a mere innocent lack of competence. I didn't know Halon's razor then, but I knew people with crushing timelines and targets to meet, reputations for getting things done, and a clear line of loyalty.

This was how I discovered some of the bugs in the initial program. As part of adopting Six Sigma, we all used a new software program called Minitab. In Minitab, you can do all kinds of things, including dragging individual data points to where you want them.

Forget deleting outliers; you could move the dot.

Handy.

In Excel, the software program everyone uses, you could present your data in a line graph instead of an XY graph. What does that do? Well, in an XY graph, if your machine goes down for five days, there will

be a gap in the line that is five days long. In a line graph, the data points appear seamless. Like nothing ever happened.

I also thought I knew some handy fonts, colours, and context tricks to make data appear as dull as I wanted or as shocking as needed, but I was observing stunning maneuvers.

It was clear that data was being used all right, and if the data could speak for itself, it wouldn't be pleased about how it was being treated.

I wasn't pleased either. In finding enough work to keep me busy, part of my duties was to train the new incumbent to my position. Immediately, I was given a double-digit raise to be brought to the same pay level as her. The same level, and I'm training her so I can move on.

On the first day, we experienced a familiar problem. I told her that three variables control this problem. I explained what they were and how they could be measured. I showed her how to measure all three. With the three measurements, I asked her to guess what was going on. She looked at me and started crying. Immediately, I jumped to soothe her, sure the blame was on me. I backed up and took it slower. It seems to be all good.

The next day, we got the same problem again. I asked her what the three variables were. She looked at me with tears welling.

On the third day, I suggested that she write down the three variables because now I wanted to cry, too.

## 4. The Path of Development

When people think of a genius, many come to mind, but one person always stands out—Einstein. The point was for him to be the one person who gets to wear that label and, in his words, to say that he sees that in everyone else.

The question isn't whether you are a genius or not. Or whether you think it's attainable or that you deserve it. It's this one: Would you want him on your basketball team?

Look in the mirror and ask if you are a fish spending your day climbing trees. You get judged for it; you try harder. Perhaps you could explain that there's something else you know you do exceptionally well. They say, "That's fine, but to get there, you have to succeed at this, jump this hoop, or put in your time."

If you don't know much about Einstein, you should know he wasn't a product of the system, far from it. In his own life, there was a time when he must have felt like that fish, and it might have been many times.

He went outside the system to find his water. He didn't choose the path of least resistance. Nor did he rise to the top because he was born into the right family at a flourishing time, attended the right schools and fell in with the leading experts. No, his path was unique.

In this way, genius remains rare and remarkable, even when everyone possesses it. It's incredibly well hidden beneath irrationality, weaknesses, and a culture prioritizing breadth over depth. Be different in a better way, or be better in a different way, but at least let your genius shine occasionally. Don't let other people keep putting trees in front of you when you need the ocean.

Do you know what you need to flourish? Do the work. Build the grit. Gain experience. But if the carrot hasn't moved any closer, cut the string, grab the carrot and find your environment. That's following in Einstein's footsteps. There's no way to be a genius without all of that. It takes hard work, knowing your inherent strengths, and a willingness to follow them. No one said it was easy or that you were entitled to it. I'm just saying you can achieve it if you want it.

## Engage Employees

If you're looking for easy ways to boost your profits and performance, consider a risk-free approach to enhancing engagement.

I've been assigned to turn around various teams and departments. They were missing their targets, blowing their budgets, and experiencing high rates of customer complaints, both internal and external. Fix them; they'd mandate it.

Universally, these poorly performing teams would be somewhere at the bottom end of the disengagement scale—not because they didn't care, but because it was necessary to survive. For me, targets, budgets, and complaints were symptoms of disengagement. While the solutions were always unique, turning the engagement situation around was a matter of executing a tried-and-true system.

Employee engagement refers to the level of commitment an individual has to an organization and its goals. Engaged employees go the extra mile to accomplish their tasks. They bring creativity, passion, and drive to their work. When engaged, they seek to improve continuously and invest in themselves and others for the organization's greater good. They are team players who foster collaboration and heighten the performance of everyone around them.

Employers are expected to want engaged employees because they directly impact the bottom line in measurable and observable ways. Engaged employees bring forward positive suggestions for improvement. They are naturally productive without pushing themselves to be overwhelmed and exhausted. They are ideal employees.

Anyone has this potential, but they can't do it alone.

## Eliminate Mistakes

Taking full responsibility for your life, how you live it, and your impact on others is crucial.

If manufacturing improves by eliminating mistakes, service must do the same. People can only crank out more until they hit a wall. They can choose between stress, overwhelm, and exhaustion, or the continual and deliberate way of excellence. When people in my industry say to work smarter, not harder, the definition of smarter is the pursuit of excellence.

While manufacturing revolutions are characterized by using machinery in faster, more efficient ways, making them quicker and better, service revolutions are marked by people's ability to bring their whole, complete, and best selves to work.

When investigations are concluded, they usually end with someone to blame. That person is fired or transferred, but they are replaced. What if instead, you end your investigation with why that person was

able to follow through on a mistaken path to execution? What processes could have detected, stopped or re-directed that energy?

Save the person, eliminate the mistake or risk active disengagement.

### *Active Disengagement*

On the contrary, actively disengaged employees will undermine the organization in undetectable ways. Disengaged employees will do what they are told and only what they are told, even when they know a different tactic would be more effective. They nod obediently, carry out instructions, and appear to be loyal followers. Meanwhile, profits tumble, expenses rise, and customers leave.

The natural response is to increase behaviour measurement and monitoring, provide more detailed instructions, and tighten controls. In some organizations, this is an unintended consequence of introducing a Lean culture. Everyone is seeking control. The misapplication of these management tools undermines the autonomy, mastery, and purpose that motivate employees.

Trust is about character and competence. You've hired employees who possess individuality that suits the role and culture and have the necessary skills to perform the work. The next step is to build on both to improve engagement.

Routine feedback about what is working, what they are doing right, and the unique strengths they bring to the table goes a long way beyond pointing out errors, criticizing actions, and trying to correct weaknesses. The former is energizing and leads to development, while the latter leads to taking fewer risks, corraling enthusiasm, and wasting energy.

Training and development for employees is often the first area of the budget to be cut in reductions. Worse still, employees misuse the money to attend conferences, networking events, or other similar gatherings. While those activities are rewarding, inspiring, and thought-provoking, they don't lead to learning outcomes.

Investing in employee development helps take engagement to the next level because, through the educational experience, you have created more competence and, therefore, more trust—trust that goes both ways. The employee feels valued, and you can build that value by increasing their ability to perform.

### *Standardization*

Second-stage failures in service are apparent when you hear someone say, "I'm just doing my job!" They are confined by processes that aren't working for the customer, but they can't do much about it. Excessive control and governance are limiting their ability to act.

The idea of standardization had been applied to people in a misguided attempt to improve their lives. Standardization should never be applied to people who do best when they can think, innovate and be themselves.

The slippery downward spiral of disengagement can bankrupt companies and destroy businesses. Between 1999 and 2009, many companies attempted to replicate the results that GE was experiencing,

attributing them to the Six Sigma methodology. Investors call it the lost decade. When 3M implemented a Six Sigma program, it realized its adverse effect on its culture of innovation and subsequently eliminated it.

Home Depot similarly gave it a whirl, only to back away, citing the destruction of customer service. Yes, the Six Sigma program, which centers on the principle of customer service, had a detrimental effect on Home Depot. It's not a head-scratcher; it's the result of how employees respond to being treated like machines.

Lean and Six Sigma work wonders in manufacturing, but you can't copy and paste the same tools and techniques into service and support functions. People are not machines.

Processes should liberate your brain for higher-order thinking and observation. Instead, they can effectively jail employees who have too much governance and control. Now that we understand cognitive biases, automatic thinking, and human nature, we require high-quality thought.

As a leader, you can enhance the lives of your employees by fostering a more engaging work environment. Many historical quality methodologies have a common thread of observation. It is the practice of visiting the shop floor and conversing with the people closest to the day-to-day activities. To improve engagement, find out what they do, think, and experience and allow them to be different and do it differently.

Shortcuts may look appealing, but they are far more expensive in the long term. With engagement, it goes like this: Send a survey. Allow employees to believe it's anonymous. Fire the ones who reveal their status as disengaged. Or at least, that's what happened to me once.

The long-term expense can push the remaining disengagement under your radar. Studies have proven that it's human nature to retaliate when one observes others being mistreated. What you don't know about can and will hurt you.

As an employee, you can polish your resume and find your fit. It might seem comforting to stay with the devil; instead, focus on what's possible rather than how things could worsen. Look up and level up. Your dreams deserve it.

### *Getting Curious*

At Leadercast 2018, Kat Cole told the story of her parents' breakup when she was nine. When her mother made the announcement, she responded, "What took you so long?" As a nine-year-old, she knew what the right course of action was. She also knew why it was a hard choice, but difficulty doesn't make it any less proper.

The core of engagement is trust, which comprises character and competence. Interviewers focus on the latter when recruiting, but they also fire for attitude, which is a manifestation of one's nature. To improve engagement, interviewers must also learn about the character being interviewed and the environment in which they will be expected to succeed.

They must determine which personality best suits the role and culture and deliberately discover what makes someone unique during the interview. Once they have honed the pool to include only those who can do the job, the next step is identifying the individuals who will be naturally engaged in the work.

Most managers inherit employees. Managers help themselves when they seek to learn about these. When you discover who they are, what motivates them, and how they naturally behave, you can help hone a role to their strengths or assist in relocating them within the organization to a better-suited job. If you can't do that, package them out with respect and generosity to find a mutually beneficial solution.

If you don't trust an employee to do the right thing, you know what the right thing is that you need to do. Let's take a page from Cole. She uses the phrase, "I would be failing you if I did not make this change."

## Review Your Performance

Knowing how well you do in each critical step will help you learn where to focus on improving your conversion yield. Your overall success rate is the multiplication of your success in each one of those steps. For instance, if you give yourself an 8 out of 10 for how well you do in each level, your overall performance is 32.7 percent. That means that of the 100 ideal customers you approach, 32 will become repeat customers, and 41 will be first-time buyers.

When you understand your performance and the numbers, you can take the exact steps to accomplish that, from determining how many people you need to contact to evaluating how well you can identify an ideal customer.

## Get Better Prospects

As a co-op student at university, I had the exciting experience of going through Toyota's interview and selection process. In the practical portion of the interview, we were given a task. Screw a pipe into a fitting. If it doesn't work, reject it and obtain a new part. Complete as many repetitions as possible within a one-minute time frame.

After that one minute, I noticed that the people who had produced the most had also created the most rejects. They didn't try to force things; they didn't push to make it work; they had higher standards for what was a good enough part.

The same principle should apply to your prospects. If they aren't ideal, make friends and connections because everyone knows someone. Then, quit lollygagging and get back to work. Find a new prospect.

The average salesperson only makes two attempts to contact prospects, while 80 percent of sales are made after the fifth contact. We are busy, and we don't like people who push. We want people who remind us of what we said we would do because we're busy and forget. Every point of contact doesn't have to be a sales call, but stay in touch and be someone they want to talk to.

## *Improve Engagement*

Above all, remember that your fundamental goal is to build relationships, and you achieve this by being a person, not a salesperson.

Knowing yourself and improving your faithfulness to yourself are how you optimize your KLTQ. You must know, like, and trust yourself before anyone else can.

One person told me, “I will never be forced into doing anything again.” How does it change your perspective when you say that?

Taking full responsibility for your life, how you live it, and your impact on others is crucial. Sure, rough situations happen as children, and you may not have made it into adulthood without signs of wear. I am very sorry if that’s happened to you.

As adults, we get to claim our recovery, define our boundaries and invest in whatever repairs might be needed. It may take a while, but you’re worth the time. Spend enough time on yourself, and you’ll be able to engage with and understand other people much better. After all, we are all human and experience similar conditions.

## *Delay Recommendations*

One day, I was telling someone about a strange and fortuitous event. The previous day, I’d explained how Lean and Six Sigma can’t work in service businesses and that I’d developed an alternative. The next step in introducing myself began with a personal experience that illustrated why what I’d said was true. I learned more about her experiences and what she’d witnessed. Later that day, I was seated next to the president in charge of the problem she’d just illustrated.

I said, “I knew exactly what her problem was!”

Later, two times, that person told me how offended they were that I’d dared say I knew their problem after meeting them. I described how I didn’t say that to the president both times. It was more of a hypothesis I held to myself to test with further questions. Talking with the president, I had nothing but questions and didn’t offer any suggestions, solutions, or insights. I just listened.

It’s not just the person I shared this story with who gets offended when you offer a premature solution. Your premature suggestion is wrong because you haven’t heard all the information. If you don’t want to spend time arguing with someone you’ve just offended, wait until they’ve finished talking before offering your recommendation.

During a few meetings, it might take them several hours to explain their problem to you. Give them that time and respect for the priority they’ve made, the effort they’ve put into it, and the fact that they are willing to share it with you. Keep listening and asking more questions until they’ve run out of things to say about it.

Then, make your recommendation. That’s the right time.



## Forget Never Buyers

Are you trying to sell to people who never make a purchase? When you can identify the people who are not ready to buy immediately, you can spend more time with those genuinely interested in your offer. People who never buy are easy to spot when you know what they do. Their behaviour gives them away every time.

As a service provider, you have the luxury of deciding who you will work with and who you don't have to deal with or don't want to deal with. Employees don't get that luxury. They must learn to be flexible and deal with conflicts when personalities clash and the hiring manager doesn't prioritize cultural fit. It's a good place to develop those skills, but now that you're a service provider in business for yourself, you can apply those skills in other areas, such as your volunteer work.

Demanders say they will only buy your product if you change it. They have a long list of features they want to see added or are seeking a substantial discount on the price. Some of this is good feedback, and some is just a polite way for a nonbuyer to get you to go away. People who don't buy don't always share why they refuse.

If you decide to add the features and meet the price point, go back and remind them that they initially wanted it, and see if they still wish to proceed with the purchase. I hope you are pleasantly surprised.

## Advice Givers

If you ever need more advice than you know what to do with, consider starting a business. Over the past year, I've had numerous people offer me advice as if I were flying by the seat of my pants or clueless about how to spend my time.

Free advice is usually worth what you pay for it. I've spent thousands of dollars on coaching, programs and courses. Some of that paid advice was entirely incorrect, but some was helpful. Now I realize I could have helped them more than they helped me, yet I will never try to sell them on my offers.

When I crafted my new About page, which will launch in September, I applied the Pixar formula to the letter. I merely filled in the blanks. I sent it to a selection of people. The people I wanted to serve responded with the kind of response I had hoped for. The people I didn't want to serve relied on suggestions for edits. I think when it comes to storytelling, Pixar might know a bit more than the free advice givers.

People giving advice often perceive themselves as being higher up the social status hierarchy. We don't buy from people we think are lower than us. We also don't advise people we look up to; we are happy to buy from them when we see that it will bring us closer to our aspirations. When people have no advice to give, they might be your ideal prospects.

## Frugal Freeloaders

Some people expect to get everything for free. As someone who loves my library card, I identify with this category without emotional cost.

In the information age, when you can find all kinds of free advice online, some people think they shouldn't have to pay anything. See above for my opinion on free advice, but until you've paid for advice, you don't realize the difference in quality.

There's a lot of free and valuable information on this blog, and many people tell me I shouldn't be giving so much away for free. If I think giving that away is okay, imagine what I am holding back. That's just the tip of the iceberg, honey. Freeloaders will have no idea.

When I offered my course, "Work Smarter Now," to employees, I realized the extent to which some employees are freeloaders. They said they couldn't afford it, and they take home a paycheck every week. They said they wouldn't spend their own money on something that would benefit their employer, and until the employer paid, they were content knowing that their time, effort, and skills were wasted. Ok, cool. That wasn't cool as an employee because my life and potential contribution to the world were wasted. But that's why I'm no longer an employee.

Some freeloaders will take you up on your offer in exchange for feedback. People who pay will also provide feedback, and paying customers are more invested in ensuring you get it right. Take their feedback, opinions, and advice and thank them sincerely.

Lazy people never take action. These aren't the people who buy gym memberships and never use them. No, as a gym owner, those customers are ideal! Lazy people never pull out their credit cards in the first place. They never take action to improve their lives.

According to them, their lives are the product of everyone else. Their hair is cut the way their hairstylist told them. They work the careers that their parents pushed them into. They have an external locus of control. Being the product of everyone else, they are not responsible for anything. They have someone to blame for their failures, unhappiness, and faults.

Lazy people might become your customers because someone pushed them there. Specifically, I can think of career counsellors who work with customers who have been terminated, and the ex-employer is paying for the service to avoid being sued. The problem with these individuals who don't take action is that they will never receive glowing testimonials. They'll drain your energy as you continue to push them without success. You'll miss out on the people who want to learn how to pivot from one employer to a better one.

If people aren't taking action in their lives to make it better, then move on. Whatever way you can help them make it better, they are stuck in the status quo of their lives. They might sound like they are complaining, but when they don't take action, you might as well call it bragging.

## *The Negative*

There's a big bucket of negative people. They are skeptical because they've been burned before. Perhaps they are financially tight and can't afford to buy. The negative response to your offer is because they don't want to reveal that they can't afford it, or it reminds them of the state of that problem. Their hateful attitude isn't directed at you; it's aimed at their empty wallet.

Haters are going to hate, critics are going to criticize, and control freaks are going to keep total control of their worlds. They will never buy. There might come a time when they fall and realize they need help.

You may still be there; you may also be retired. If there's one thing for sure, no one knows what the future holds. Haters might find love, broke-asses might get their financial lives in order, and control freaks might realize they need help. Some people do change. Please help your fellow service professionals make the most of their time by sharing this post with them. They need to know that it's not you; it's them.

## Find the Gem

In most conversations, we wait for the other person to stop talking before we start. Some people aren't so patient.

Your opinion can influence how you interpret what you hear, phrase questions to obtain your desired answers, and even justify ignoring what you know you've heard. Because everyone is susceptible to these traps, experts have devised reliable techniques to be the master of your own opinion and how to use it to listen for opportunities.

When there were no answers, we looked to religion. About 300 years ago, science emerged to reclaim control from the church. A few people decided that they wanted to think, do, and believe in different things.

They embarked on a journey to reclaim control that they had given away to someone else. Every one of us has imprints in our grandparents and parents' DNA, including their reactions to the traumas they've suffered. Then there are behaviours we think of as usual because we either lived through them or decided to take someone's word for it.

Mind mastery involves continually testing beliefs to determine their validity. How we test is critically important. Each of us is wired to test our beliefs in irrational ways.

## Listen Harder

When I tell people certain things, and they say, "Oh, I like that," it also means they will reject beliefs they don't like.

There is a scientific fact that many people don't want to believe: by age 35, we are considered concrete. We have solid personalities, preferences and perceptions, and nothing will change that. The problem is that life comes along and forces change upon us. Adapting to change becomes difficult when you lose the fluidity of choice.

If there's one thing everyone agrees on, it's that the pace of change is accelerating. Faster and exponentially faster. That means concrete beings might run out of runway often and sooner than expected.

Another truth is that technology is making it easier and easier to become concrete earlier. Technology allows us to filter friends, information and experiences to those we've already chosen. It blocks out new choices and only shows things based on our pasts.

We look to data for new insights, ideas, and even new perspectives on the world. Data helps us see what we cannot see with our eyes.

It's human nature to have a strong ego and prioritize one's needs. Despite the hype surrounding everyone else, we know it's all about you; you are the only one who genuinely prioritizes yourself. Putting them first doesn't put you second. It puts you both first. Think shoulder to shoulder. You're in it together.

Only through a comparison of perspectives can the truth be found. Discover the truth in your beliefs, assumptions and all the illusions between you and the facts – and you can only do that by asking someone else what they see, feel, and think. Listen harder when you want to disagree.

Getting out of your way by working shoulder-to-shoulder with the people you want to work with is how you grow as a business, achieve aligned engagement within an organization, and build happy and lasting relationships with those you care about.

### *Engage Suggestions*

Make their opinion matter as much as yours because your brain is heavily tipping the scales in your favour.

One way to help you focus on their opinion is the power of visualization. When they are speaking, try to picture what the speaker is saying. If your eyes wander, you know your attention wanders, too. The same is true for the mind's eye – if you visualize something else, you aren't hearing what the other person is saying.

Doing so engages you on a deeper level. You might create a mental model of communicated information or form a literal picture. Your brain will do the necessary work to stay focused, with all your senses fully alert.

When listening for extended periods, focus on identifying keywords and phrases. Focus solely on what the other person is saying and disregard everything else. Instead of focusing on your reaction to their words, stay tuned to their opinion by feeling what they are feeling or expressing.

Not only will mirroring their emotional state put them at ease, but you will also be better positioned to ignore how you would have been thinking or feeling. When you connect with them emotionally, they will likely open up to you and share more profound insights. They want to know that you understand them and what they communicate.

Convey their feelings through your facial expressions and body language, and you'll be better able to feel the emotional state they are reflecting.

### *Staying the Course*

When we ask the speaker questions, we often unintentionally alter the course of the conversation. We might be trying to keep them on the track they said they would stay on, but they'll likely realize they'll head down a tangent instead. Go down the tangent with them.

As communicators, we might pre-plan what we think we will say, but something entirely different becomes more critical, and we decide to talk about that instead. To the listener, it's a tangent; to the communicator, it's the actual subject matter.

Your target is going to talk about what is important to them. The conversation doesn't have to follow a logical framework or answer your question. Let the speaker take the conversation wherever they want and follow where they decide to go. Let the speaker lead, and be a passive yet interested follower.

Give regular feedback to show that you are paying attention. When the speaker stops talking, reflecting on what you've just heard is essential.

You might say, "You must have been thrilled," or "I can see that you would have been confused." If the speaker's feelings are unclear, you might nod or give a well-timed "hmmm" or "uh huh."

The idea is to demonstrate that you are engaged and interested in them, listening and following their train of thought.

It can be highly maddening for a speaker to finish talking and have the listener respond with something wholly off-topic or as if they were waiting their turn. Provide feedback as appropriate, but refrain from sharing your opinion.

### *Unbalance the Scale*

People usually politely edit and condense what they want to say to maintain an equal and well-paced conversation. Your job is only to keep them talking. Your goal is to build relationships above all else.

In his classic work, "How to Win Friends and Influence People," Dale Carnegie advised, "Ask questions that the other person will enjoy answering."

Researchers have found that when questions start as safe and then gradually escalate toward more sensitive ones, the other person tends to like you more. The effect is so strong that it's called "the relationship closeness induction."

Once you've started the dialogue with an invited question about their accomplishments, goals, and dreams, you want to continue to solicit as much information as possible.

You do that by asking questions about their answers. Keep your line of questioning inviting, warm and friendly. Follow-up questions indicate that you are listening attentively and are genuinely interested in learning more.

No one likes to feel interrogated. Some questions can force the speaker into a yes-or-no corner. Open-ended questions are the opposite. When you leave the answer open, you will find hidden, unexpected responses you could have never anticipated. They are the harbingers of innovation.

You should also realize that open-ended questions leave room for interpretation. They allow the respondent to lie by omission or dodge the question entirely.

Perhaps you spy a gap that the speaker would love to solve. They've tried a few strategies, and they haven't worked. It continues to cause problems, and they might be close to giving up. This is when you ask, "It sounds like you could use some help..." and complete the sentence with the target problem.

When they say yes, please, you've found the thing you can solve that is worth spending your time and energy to develop.

## Make Sales Systematic

Need to master your sales system? If you still fail to sign prospects and don't know why you haven't achieved higher conversions, you haven't mastered it. If you're tired of rejections, wasting your time, and worrying about your bills, it's time to master your sales system.

Like many things in business, sales are the function of a process. Like processes, it has specific steps. Those particular steps change in small ways consistently and less frequently; an overhaul is required to bring it up to current times.

Sales are relationship-based, and that relationship is changing. These days, we expect to be treated more as equals than ever. In the past, we didn't have access to the Internet, and we didn't show up at the car dealership with data, reviews, and opinions.

In the past, we expected and needed the salesman to provide the information. Getting a reasonable price meant visiting as many as necessary before you felt you had some bargaining power.

These days, we might know more about the vehicle than the seller. That should command the respect of being treated more like a partner. Use this five-step process to create partnerships with your ideal customers.

1. Leads perk up with interest
2. They come to know, like and trust you.
3. Potential customers feel that you “get” them.
4. They review your recommendation and sign up.
5. They return to you with the following problem, opportunity, or question.

## Gather Leads

Getting leads to perk up with interest means putting yourself out there. You need to shake hands, make calls, and present to audiences. You are guest posting online, active on social media, and listed in directories.

When they perk up with interest, they will come over. Interested potential customers will visit your website's online home, read your bios, and introduce themselves. In these interactions, you do everything possible to build your KLTQ (know-like and trust quotient).

They conclude that you get them by drawing commonalities, using their language, and reflecting on what you've heard them say.

After that, and no sooner, you explain how you can help them get there faster, better or cheaper. You ask for the sale and allow them to pay you quickly.

They know you are the source to go to when they need more. You might consider those problems for future growth or recommend someone else.

Master those five steps in that order, and you'll have a sales process that is painless, authentic and effective.

## *Investigate Sluggish Sales*

When winter's big, fluffy, beautiful flakes began to fall, I embraced it as God's art. As a rider, he embraced it as a visibility problem. Here, he said, handing over his Hyperswipe. I have this, he said, demonstrating his finger wiper. I strapped it to the back of my left knuckles and happily rode along. The following year, I wanted that finger wiper and ended up with men's gloves.

One day in Matane, we looked out the window at perfect weather while his machine was being repaired. While they prepared the bill, I thought it a good idea to warn him that decimal places were written as commas in French.

We wanted to replicate the excellent morning in Percé, so we'd arranged to meet up with friends there, travelling in the opposite direction one night. We arrived around dinner time, only to find a sign on the hotel stating it was closed. We headed to town to find the only gas station that was shrink-wrapped. Our gas lights were on, and we had no choice but to ask around. We found rooms and gas, and when our friends showed up a couple of hours later, all the answers.

That night, when I looked around the restaurant, I saw our gang and another couple. When I saw the woman, I realized I hadn't seen one on these trips. I am not outgoing by any means, but I couldn't help but go over and introduce myself.

I was awed when I learned she rode a Yamaha. Wow, I thought, not only do you get here, too, but you do it on that.

This year, everything I have needs replacing. My boots are cracked. My laces have been replaced twice and are down to the core threads. The outer layer of my pants is melted on the bottom, and the zipper fabric's wind protection is cracking. I've missed the lack of pockets, as there is only one on the chest, and I've appreciated the extra room that accommodates extra layers and provides maximum maneuverability. I'd go one size smaller and have more pockets. All my gloves are worn through and matted.

Everything was failing, and I knew exactly what to buy. Years later, there is still little in the women's department. It's a strange experience to have money to spend and be confronted with a void of offers.

## *Simplify Purchasing*

Your cart should be a glitch-free, easy experience. You should quickly take the credit card number, whether you are taking payments online or in person.

Some sites offer discounts if you add an item to your cart and close the page. They try to entice you back to buy it. However, in the long run, people will automatically discount the price if willing to take the delay.

Provide a reason when offering discounts. Promotional discounts can be tied to a specific time of year, allowing you to take advantage of them. Whatever the reason, make sure to provide one; otherwise, the unstated impression is that it is only worth the price you are asking, with no discount.

Discounted prices significantly influence our perceptions. Once we know we can obtain a product for \$20 at certain times of the year, we won't have to pay the regular \$100 again. We might stock up, and if you're driving that behaviour, realize you're robbing the future to pay for the present.

Mind your promotions and their effectiveness, and continue doing what works.

## Research the Market

Growing your business is a cinch if your prospects say, "Yes, please!" As consumers, there are things we buy even when we know we can't afford them. You need to consider the substantial debt burden carried by individuals to governments. You can also check out the stock performance of companies like Visa.

When I launched a website in July 2017, I aimed to find out as fast as possible what would make my audience say yes. I knew I could do many things but didn't realize who cared. All I had developed was a methodology to prevent the predictable mistakes humans make when performing the most common tasks in business. I'd learned about the psychology of continuous improvement and problem-solving, but there's a lot you can do with a methodology.

The first mistake we make in business is thinking that our potential market is everyone. In my case, that was even more true because everyone has a brain. However, since I knew better than to believe my knee-jerk reaction answer to that question, I also realized that not everyone cares about doing things right or better.

## Eliminate the Duds

One particular dud was the test of a product that promised to shave 10 hours off your work week. "Who wouldn't want that?" my mentor asked, who hadn't signed up. "10 hours? That would give me enough time to finish all my projects," said someone else, who also didn't sign up. In fact, of the 100 people I tested it with, only four were willing to spend the one hour it cost. The price was free.

The research didn't end there. I followed up with the 94 non-interested. Their feedback helped me with my next pivot, which led to the next one, the next, and the next.

They are great methodologies when you are in manufacturing, and the things are tangible, repeatable and permanent. It is apt to go wrong when the work is invisible, unique every time and fleeting. For the latter, you must understand how the brain works, not how machines perform the task.

Even in manufacturing, Lean proponents are leading it, not working in it. CEOs don't care about cutting costs, which is Lean's objective; they care about growing top-line sales.

You can argue that Lean helps you deliver better results, leading to repeatable business; however, this is not a compelling argument. CEOs tend to prioritize maintaining their jobs over streamlining processes.

Talking Lean to an employee is like a vampire talking to a human. Stay away, don't suck the fun out of my job, is the message they radiate.



## *Accept Feedback*

Accepting reality isn't something we do very well. It might mean change, and that's a scary prospect. It might mean looking in the mirror and seeing something unattractive. So, we stay so busy that these unwelcome thoughts don't permeate our consciousness. Or we drown them out with alcohol, shove them down with food, or cover them over with new purchases of stuff we don't need.

The thing about denying reality is that it doesn't go away, no matter how hard you try. You may not know that it's not as scary as you might think when you look at it. The mere act of looking shrinks it down and gives you power.

When you look at your prospects, current customer list or potential audience, can you see what pain they are trying to pretend is all good? When you discover the source of hidden pain, speak to them in their language and demonstrate that you can alleviate it; your prospects will say 'yes, please' every time.

## *Continue Specializing*

As you solve your customers' problems, new ones will arise, and you must decide what to do. You can address that problem yourself or recommend someone else. The relationship with someone else can take many forms, from a formal affiliate relationship to an informal network or a deal with karma.

It's a good deal with karma because you have more time to improve when you refer to work that isn't in your number one or two wheelhouse. Whenever you say yes, it means you are rejecting many things, and many of them you will never know. Some of them might be perfect.

Having a handle on your finances will help you determine how much breathing room you have and what risks you can take. Try taking fewer and fewer chances with customers you are unsure about, projects that don't excite you and work that isn't up to par.

Specialization is the paradoxical key to growth and attracting a multitude of customers. Do not fear the niche or the no—it's how you grow.

## *Promote for Diversity*

Researchers have recently revealed a secret ingredient that can help you cultivate a culture of innovation.

Anthropologists studied two hunter-gatherer populations. Both numbered about 20, moved every 10 days, and lived on hunted game and fish and gathered fruit, vegetables, and honey. The difference between the two populations was the degree of equality.

You might think of hunter-gatherers as macho men pulling their women around by their hair. Instead, researchers at the University of Oxford have found that equality is the norm in contemporary tribes. Men and women have equal influence on their community membership and where they live.

In tribes where men dominated, they lived near their kin. When equality reigned, populations were more diverse, and networks extended farther.

## The Effects of Equal Influence

A diverse and far-reaching population would have been advantageous for progress. The researchers argued that wider-ranging social networks would have led to the sharing of more innovations, better choice of mates and closer cooperation between unrelated individuals.

In business environments, a broader network translates into similar advantages for spreading and fostering innovation. More ideas get circulated, more problems are shared, and more solutions are generated.

But we don't have equal environments in business.

## *The Dawn of Accumulation*

We started farming as humans realized hunting is much easier when you can make the herd come to you. The researchers argue that inequality emerged with the advent of agriculture and the development of the ability to accumulate resources.

In this agricultural age, having close kin as neighbours became advantageous. Hearing about the novel invention on the other coast wasn't as helpful as your brother and his five kids across the street. Even better assistance would be if those kids were all strong boys.

With the dawn of the agricultural age, equality no longer outmatched the advantages of male domination. Being able to stay in one place allowed for accumulation. When men can take more than one wife, they accumulate faster than women. Forming alliances with male kin and collecting together starts to pay off.

The advantage of proximity carried over into early manufacturing when people were akin to machines. Henry Ford was known to have lamented, "Why is it every time I ask for a pair of hands, they come with a brain attached?"

## *Teams that Think*

With the age of knowledge work, we started to hire brains, but the legacy of manufacturing remains. It's a constant struggle for equal influence in the boardroom.

To produce "thinking teams" instead of "doing teams," hunter-gatherer tribes might hold the key.

As we moved into the manufacturing age, teams and their larger versions, organizations, became mini-replicas of the agricultural community design. It was the standard culture.

Capitalism and male domination seem to go hand in hand to survive beyond everyone else. With nuclear power, the survival of the strongest creates an annulment.

Now, we say we want equality, but we suffer from male domination. The challenge isn't determining the vision but how to get there.

A director of Quality in a courier business shared her unique perspective with me. One day, a customer was distressed because she had not received her package on time. "Join the club," this Director laughed.

In her shoes, many other people didn't get theirs either, so this question was posed to the customer suffering from the lack of quality. With so many customers who are also struggling, what makes you unique?

According to the story, the customer replied that it was her wedding dress, and therefore, having missed that Friday's delivery, Monday wouldn't save anything. Today or never, the customer implored.

With that directive, the Director searched for the missing package. She located it; it should have gone out that day but didn't. When she got back on the phone, what did she say?

"You can wait until Monday! I've found your package, and there's no way there's a wedding dress here, you liar!" She told me how she slammed the phone down while grinning at me, proud of her role in the story.

That package should have gone out; the customer was in the right, and frankly, who are we to judge what people wear when they get married? For some destination weddings, a white bikini is all the rage, while a veil is all it takes at nudist resorts. How can you judge by the size?

When women don't have the power or equality they deserve, they extract it from where they can get it. If your Director of Quality has an axe to grind, she will do it on a customer, a direct report, or another employee lower in the hierarchy.

Equality might be the only way to motivate teams to think about profits, customers, and success.

### *Getting to Innovative Cultures*

Sheryl Sandberg has encouraged businesswomen to "lean in" and take their seats at the table. Take two peers with you if you're the first woman to sit at that table. One is an anomaly, two are abnormal, but three start a trend.

For anyone who sits at the table, the way to get there is to be present. Conquer your cognitive biases to be more intelligent than the rest. Instead of accumulation, you have an enlightened worldview and heftier goals.

Love is the killer app, says Tim Sanders. Jack Ma, the billionaire owner of Alibaba, says it's all about love. He says you must genuinely love your team and what you're working towards together. It gives you a larger purpose for when things get complicated.

The organizational design best suited for today's challenges offers equality and diversity. When you promote people, send them far and wide. Transferable skills take you to the next rung on the ladder and a new one altogether.

### *Lost Voices*

If you haven't heard of the Asch experiments, you may not realize the power of your voice and how you can reclaim it. Did you even know you lost it?

At a recent conference, I was dismayed to watch the keynote speaker read her address to us. Read. I couldn't help but think, I didn't pay all this money to have someone read to me.

Sure, leaders read to us all the time. Big names who call themselves speakers do it. Their teleprompters are mounted at eye level or directly behind the camera, which lets the audience trick us into thinking they are speaking because they are making eye contact.

When the notes are on the podium, maintaining eye contact can be a challenging task. When the speaker looked up at us, she'd lose her spot on the page and then lose it again when she looked back down. This created ill-placed pauses. Other times, she'd stumble over the sentence and decide to go back and read the sentence from the beginning. For me, these repetitions interrupted my ability to stay tuned.

I'm sure you never want to sit through a forty-five-minute keynote address where you've paid a decent amount to attend, only to have the speaker dispassionately read their life story to you. If you want to pour salt on the fact that you aren't getting that time or money back, check out Toastmasters. At every meeting, it's someone's job to count how many "umms," "ahs," "so's," and other filler words are used.

For forty-five minutes, I couldn't help but notice the reliance on notes, thinking, 'This is your life story. Didn't you live it?' Everyone's first speech in Toastmasters is an introduction to who they are and some aspect of their life story. This was the most prolonged and painful first speech I'd ever heard.

### *Body Language and Tone*

Delivering a speech is essential. I can't listen to your message if I'm distracted by your mannerisms or hearing you. Once you are speaking loud enough with enough composure, your message matters. In contrast, if your message doesn't matter, it doesn't matter how well you deliver it. Becoming a great speaker is as much about what you say as it is about how you say it.

Standards are based on our perspectives. Toastmasters taught me about delivery, TED talks taught me about content, and the two groups I joined taught me about the pitfalls of learning when no one at the table is more qualified than you.

Our standards are formed on the backbones of our experiences. Everyone's scale is relative. When asked for a rating on one of our scales, it's not just the relative value that matters. It's also about who's asking, how much we have to lose, and even how much time we have at that given moment.

At the end of that conference, I ignored the feedback form on the table before me and bolted for the door. I had nothing nice to say, and my grandma told me, "If you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything at all."

Everyone else seems to do a much better job of following that advice. For me, that advice no longer works. That advice leads to people falling into the hands of abusers because earlier victims didn't have anything nice to say, so they didn't say anything at all. In my experience, when someone speaks up, it's not because they are brave, audacious or bold – I suspect that it's because they are tired.

### *Having A Message*

For Rosa Parks, it's tiring to keep standing while inequality rains down around you. Rose McGowan got tired of having long, luscious locks. She claims she shaved her head because she always wanted short

hair. These women are brave. It was a requirement, not because they set out to be. Someone told me recently that you never know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice.

We constantly make choices based on the external world, not our heads, hearts, and hands. The famous Asch experiments demonstrated how much we change our minds when we conform to the group.

In these experiments, subjects were asked to answer simple questions with obvious answers. Around the room, they'd ask each person for the answer. Each person would give the same but wrong answer. When it came to the subject, the real test was to see what answer they would provide.

The subject followed suit an alarming 38 percent of the time. Throughout 12 trials, 3 out of 4 participants yielded to the majority at least once.

After the question-and-answer session, subjects estimated they changed their answer only a tiny fraction of the amount they had.

As Clifford Nass and his team discovered, we even lie to protect the feelings of a laptop. Brain scans now reveal that when people conform to group expectations, they change their minds rather than simply accepting conformity<sup>1</sup>.

### *Walking Away Unheard*

Some prefer the periphery. Asch found that 25 percent consistently defied the majority, and 95 percent stuck to their answers at least once. Innovators tend to be risk-takers, motivated by independence, financial gain, and intellectual challenge, but not by job security or responsibility.

When that speaker finished and everyone stood, I stood, too. While silently rebelling by clapping with zero volume, I conformed to the majority. I chose short-term comfort when I ignored the feedback from the door. Everybody lies to make life and relationships more effortless, but sometimes, those lies involve sacrificing what's right for the long term for what's comfortable for the short term.

Adopting the views of others is often a self-preservation mechanism. We maintain our jobs, friendships, and the status quo. As Dr. Phil would ask, "How's that working for you?"

Only you know when it's your time to speak up, and I will applaud you. I only care that you have something to say that isn't in line with everyone else. Even if you stumble over your words, I won't be counting your filler words. I will lean in if you can only manage a whisper. You won't see a stopwatch in my hand. It's up to you to say when the time's up.

### *Shocking Heros*

To have been one of the first women hired for my job made me the lucky one, for I got to see an insider's world with an outsider's perspective. From my eyes out, everything looked normal. Highly male, and that was my norm. A male-dominated environment is what you get used to through high school, and then into university, women fade away and drop out.

One day, it came down to a weight problem. One machine was producing nylon over the weight limit. Such a problem is usually easy to solve. Push less nylon through, and you'll have less to weigh.

Unfortunately, normal measures didn't work. This problem was escalated to an engineer with more experience than I. However, the meeting produced no other issues on that day. Without other matters, I was walking away empty-handed. With a whole day to fill and no pressing work, my imagination ran wild.

Then, I was called back to reality: "Why don't you take it on today?"

People laughed as if a junior engineer would accomplish in one day what the best site experts hadn't figured out in the several weeks they'd been working on it.

I did not laugh but felt the excess weight land on my shoulders.

### *Healthy Stress*

I returned to my office and shared the news of my new assignment. There was no laughter here, but helpful questions that would help frame my troubleshooting process. Whether I was working on my car with my dad or on an esoteric problem in life, I'd always start at the end and work backward.

First, I gathered the real data through the tried and true. I tried the usual troubleshooting methods, turning down the pump speeds and waiting for the new level to normalize before asking for samples. After the fourth or fifth try, the operator said the mind-blowing words, "I don't think you are doing anything."

The data was on his side. No matter how I turned the knob, the numbers didn't respond. Why not?

Getting help was always a fun trick. You'd go to the breakroom where the electricians, mechanics, or whatever group you needed hung out. If there were people there, they might help you. Guaranteed help took planning or escalation, but if you could inspire someone to help you, you could get farther faster.

Just as I found that purpose, autonomy, and mastery make for work that doesn't feel like it, I found an electrician who felt the same way. Asking if anyone wanted to help me troubleshoot something usually meant someone would give up the rest of their lunch hour to do something interesting.

The electrician and I traced the power to that nonresponsive pump. We went through doors marked for electricians only and arrived at a large bank of programmable logic controllers. Nestled into a dark recess was a switch. This switch allowed the machine to be fed from one pump or another. Somehow, the switch had been flipped and reacted to the wrong pump.

### *Loyalty*

I could never have hypothesized such an outcome. Such is the downfall of a scientific approach. If you can't imagine it, you can't begin to try to find it, but if you let the data and real life lead, it will never let you down.

I still remember the delight as one of the most incredible feelings I've ever had when I first spotted the switch. The electrician explained why it was there. Things get forgotten in time in a building and a production line that's been running for decades. Projects are routinely sloppy, even the best ones. Things get left, people leave, and knowledge goes with them.

I couldn't wait to tell everyone who laughed at me that morning about the conclusion of my efforts. I couldn't wipe the grin off my face.

Walking into the meeting the next day and having nothing to say and show for my time would have been wholly expected and acceptable. To walk in with the solution would be to walk in on clouds. I thought only of my redemption and nothing of how anyone else might feel or how people might react to me.

I didn't wait until the following day. I found the original team responsible in their war room with their diagrams and drawings.

When I shared the news, their faces were crushed, not lit up. Then, my face fell, too.

### *Curiosity*

When they signed me up for the first wave of Six Sigma Black Belts, against the requirements of rank, experience, and time with the company, I was sure it would shed light on what had just gone wrong.

What I took for granted then and realized after twenty years of studying quality, organizations, and problem-solving was living and breathing in a real-world textbook example of an extraordinary and durable organization. I read their book, but having no other organization with whom to compare them, I passed it off as silly propaganda.

I knew I had succeeded because I took a hands-on approach based on the humility that I knew nothing. The senior engineers were stymied because they took a theoretical approach and started with technical layouts. The tenacity to keep going despite tears rolling down my face was on full display, even if it played out in an entirely different emotional circuit.

## 5. The Art of Launching

It was a Friday morning in March, and I needed an emotional boost to start the day. I have a cat, and burying my face in her furry softness often does the trick. This day, however, she didn't welcome me in as she always had.

Or it might have been that she saw something that scared her, as she is a lot of a scaredy-cat and freaks out daily. She swiped with her claw and caught my eyeball as she freaked out.

Immediately, I couldn't see with that eye. Thankfully, I remain rational in a crisis and am fortunate that my eye doctor advised me to come in now. I jumped in my vehicle and drove. Experiencing monocular vision and panicking at the prospect of dirty germs in my eye, I wasn't the friendliest driver. That's when I wanted a light, like a volunteer firefighter, to put on my dash to say, "Get out of my way—medical emergency here."

I say it's a passé idea because self-driving cars can coordinate with each other, and no light will be needed. But there you have it; don't ask anyone when innovation is your goal. Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Henry Ford said that if he'd asked, they'd have said they wanted faster horses.

## Almost Missing Out

When I graduated with an engineering degree, I realized that I'd spent five years learning about accuracy and precision, only to arrive at an answer and then multiply it by a random factor of two, for engineering's sake.

Engineering is neither accurate nor precise, but guided by science to the ambiguous edge of progress, where safety is the sake. Plant a stake with the best compass available, then extend your protection zone as far as possible.

Who better to further this career with than the leaders of safety and the makers of explosives?

Unfortunately, I realized this at the eleventh hour. The posting closed at midnight, so I had an hour to prepare and submit my application. Why do we all wait until the last minute to act? If that's what we do, beware those who use that fact to market against you.

## Flying into Action

I leapt out of my futon on the floor of my bachelor pad, where I was learning that I don't like capital projects, the consumer goods industry, or certain corporate cultures.

This job would be free of everything currently listed in my "don't want" category. If all I learned through my co-op time sampling five different companies and five different roles is what I didn't want, it was a leap toward discovering what I did like.

How did I not know that in the previous week, or while at work with access to a computer and fax?

I wasn't that I didn't know; I'd deemed the decision irrelevant. I hadn't seen the job through the lens of a potential engineer but through the lens of a potential wife.

The job was in the hometown of my on-and-off-again boyfriend. When we were on, of course, that's where we'd both gain employment, like other couples I'd heard of at that location. However, we were off, and my head, heart, and gut were no longer aligned.

At least if I apply, I'd kick that can down the road. In the meantime, clarity might strike, or a decision might be made for me. Until then, I wouldn't declare game over with any time left on the board.

In my best engineering handwriting, I completed the required application form, attached my resume and found a corner store with a fax machine.

When I got an interview, I was overjoyed. They offered to fly me out and put me up in the fanciest hotel in town for the night. I suggested I could drive but didn't mention I knew the way.

"Flying is safer," they told me.

Safer? Usually, the operative word is cheaper, so I started wondering about a whole new world of possibility. How can you make your prospects wonder and dream of a new future that only you can unleash?



## *Performance Testing*

The interview process was like no other, and I've never seen or witnessed another like it. First, the sheer amount of time invested. Second, meeting other candidates and going through exercises with them and against them is something I've only ever seen on television.

We were toured through the research and development building. I wondered if the test here was to assess how you are in an introverted, self-paced environment or whether you can see the potential in the pursuits underway.

We were toured through the manufacturing plant. The test here is to check how comfortable you are in a loud, distracting environment or whether you can stay between the yellow lines, mind all the safety signs, and still be able to follow what the guide is saying.

Perhaps if I'd not been in and around operations in Fort McMurray, I'd have been rattled, but when I was there and noticed a fire that needed to be put out and no one around but me, rattled is a luxury when surrounded by oil. Nothing was on fire, and there seemed to be a symphony to the chaos.

It was in the tour that I realized I'd squeaked in. One employee remarked that someone had filled in the application by hand. By hand! Who would be so lackadaisical? I shrugged and realized my face, expressing shock, would be appropriate, if for the wrong reason.

If you are about to launch, have you adequately tested the performance of everything your customer will use and on which you will rely to make the sale seamless? Shop yourself, stress the system, and back up the supply chain.

## *Sharing the Facts*

During the group test, we were each given stories of a crime. We each received individual tales and were told we'd be required to solve them.

In my group, we all read our stories. I noted interesting things, like specifics in some places and generalities in others. When no one else spoke first, I asked if we could share the private facts to each of us.

"Facts? What do you mean? What are facts?" a potential operator, interviewing to join the union, asked.

"Dates, times, names." For example, I proceeded to dissect the facts from my story, showing them what was qualified and what was quantified. I found out much later that we had a record time of completion. What teamwork!

Everyone has individual tales called their lives. Your innovation must fit their narrative, not yours. When you share just the facts, you allow them the creativity and freedom to figure out how it fits.

When you listen to critics and naysayers, listen to whether they share facts or opinions—facts or what they suspect might happen. Take the facts and leave the rest with a grain of salt.

## *Conforming to Culture*

Every day, I woke up feeling like today might be the day they realized they had made a mistake by letting me in—the one with the handwritten application. Imposter syndrome had nothing to do with all the facts I could list.

I'd walk past the gate every day and wave to the guard. I knew his name, and he knew mine. I'd often have to go into his office and sign in, and he'd ask me what work brought me on-site after hours. Through the signing-in processes, he'd come to learn of the work I did, along with personal details like doctors' appointments, and later, finally, of interviews elsewhere.

Before arriving at my office, I felt like someone had my back and cared about my goings-on. Engagement surveys ask if you have this kind of emotional need met at work, and I've always wondered if guards knew they provided this security as well.

Heading through the heavy doors, I'd enter a building and join a manufacturing line that produced parachutes for world wars and now made airbags performing critical functions. Every day, I'd remember the two per day that didn't have a better experience and wonder what we were doing to continue to drive that number down.

Minding the yellow lines marking the pedestrian-friendly concrete from the lanes for robots and other vehicles, looking in mirrors to see around corners, and complying with signs to hold the handrail, I'd get to my office.

I didn't realize I was so lucky to have an office with a door and share it with some of the most brilliant co-workers I've had the opportunity to learn with and from. It looked like a portable landed on the roof, and it might not be far from the truth.

In my office, I'd change into my safety shoes, tie my hair back, and remove my earrings, necklace, and watch. Then, I'd remove my engineering ring, slide it onto the watch's band, and secure it through my belt loop.

After a few months, I realized it was just as well to cut off my hair and leave my jewelry at home. Grabbing my safety glasses, a new pair of earplugs, and sleeves, I'd head to the morning meeting if it was summer. Sleeves were this innovation a colleague made to comply with the standard of long sleeves, while enjoying summer weather and the golf shirts we sometimes could earn.

What cultural barriers might impede your innovation? Alternatively, what might help it become a newly embedded part of everyday life?

## *Channeling Information*

As a new engineer, daily meetings were the essence of my role. As a technical team representative, we met daily with the maintenance and process teams. In these meetings, I picked up my work for that day, whatever it may be. The thrill of knowing I'd be busy and the ambiguity of not knowing what that would be were the perfect combination for me.

These meetings were the pulse of the plant. If there was any information we needed to know from above, it was presented in the meeting. If problems or issues needed escalation, they went up the channel corresponding to the appropriate team and their next regularly scheduled meeting.

When things get interesting, it is always related to answering the question of responsibility: Which team is the appropriate one?

### *Silenced Contributors*

When things go wrong, the standard procedure is for the operator to be the first to notice, as they perform their regular quality control checks. Escalation is first to the supervisor, who follows the letter and no more of what they are trained to do. If that doesn't work, they escalate.

To me. The first crushing blow to my confidence was that I would be third in a line of defence of which I knew nothing. Moreover, this line could and would call in the middle of the night, on weekends, whenever crisis happens. Truthfully, I never felt alone or hung out to dry.

One day, I did offer my opinion along with my answer. I was educated in no uncertain terms, and my opinion was not required. When someone of higher rank questions you, "How?" you start with "Step one." You do not backtrack or say what risks, cans, or worms might be involved. It was my lesson in asking "How high?" should I ever be told to jump.

With that lesson, I no longer cared if I was to be fired, found out to be an imposter, or held any reservation for thinking my opinion wasn't relevant. Like a perfect backfire, I would keep my opinions to myself, for we should never take things of value away from people who will not treat them with the worth they deserve.

In my defence, I wasn't sure this new senior manager had been in his role long enough to appreciate the enormity of the risk behind what he was asking. Engineers take an ethics class. We take an oath when we graduate, pledging service to society. Another engineer places a ring on the smallest finger of your working hand so that you remember and carry your oath with you.

Is there more help around you than you currently allow?

### *Own Ignorance*

Maybe the engineer's ring is just so everyone else can recognize an engineer from across a room and save themselves.

Safety first, and the DNA pool might appreciate the protection. At least I learned a valuable lesson about delivering unwanted information. Whether you fail forward or fail backward, lessons must always be learned.

Be grateful for the excellent mentors and intelligent people who came before you. Some documented some stuff, so you don't have to worry about remembering everything. Maybe they learned a few rules of thumb they are willing to share. If you are lucky, they will tell you everything you need to know if you know how to listen and ask questions. The problem with asking questions is realizing you don't know the answer.

To realize everything that you don't know is everything. To be ignorant is to be unaware; you can't be aware of everything.

To ask a question is the ability to think in advance and run into imaginary difficulty, giving you the insight to ask a question. Expand what they told you in more directions until you realize they don't know and stop trying to figure it out on the spot.

### *Pause Answers*

If you think a question is difficult now, try answering it at three in the morning when you've just woken up from that nightmare where you are caught naked in the town square. The best answer, out of the mouths of geniuses, is "Give me a few minutes. I'll get right back to you."

We don't take time for ourselves, especially when everyone expects us to get it right, to keep our needs to ourselves, and to be quiet and blend in for society's sake.

Women aren't prone to taking time and hitting pause to ensure they can bring their best selves to the game, not their immediate selves.

Lessons learned about putting myself first might have had to come from men because, despite all the airline attendants telling us to take care of ourselves first, women aren't getting it.

### *Knowing When to Quit*

Self-confidence empowers you to overcome any challenge. Regarding groups, they are more likely to follow a self-confident person than a competent one. Competence stems from years of experience, training, and expertise, but self-confidence can be developed more quickly.

Do you consciously build self-confidence daily or focus on what didn't go right? It's easy to beat yourself up, but when we silence our inner critic and cultivate our inner cheerleader, we will see our failures diminish, our accomplishments grow, and the size of the challenges we can take on become more substantial.

What one thing do you need to do today? If you are trying to lose weight, that might include eating a high-protein breakfast, going to the gym at lunch and avoiding snacking after dinner. Make a list. You can now use this daily checklist to track your progress.

Confidence comes from knowing what you need to do and feeling prepared. When you have a list, you are on your way.

I may have resigned more than my fair share, and I am no longer shocked when someone asks me, "Why would you leave a good job?"

They are *\*were\** good jobs. Just not good for me.

So, how do you decide when to leap?

### *When you aren't having fun anymore*

As an introvert, I relish and need time alone. When I was assigned to a team project that required travel with three other people, I spent the entire week with them from breakfast to evening. I tried to suck it up, and then I tried to meet my needs by skipping dinner and having that time to recharge. I tried explaining it to my manager, but never seeing her made that difficult.

After six months, at the end of my emotional rope, I just up and quit without another job to go to. It was the best decision I could have made for my health and happiness, but one that I couldn't have made without a solid handle on my finances.

If you wake up in the morning without something to look forward to in your day, or at least your week, you might have run out of enthusiasm for the work. If this is the case, start looking. It is possible to have fun and enjoy work; when you don't, it will begin to reflect on the quality of your work and your life outside of work. Before long, the question might morph from "What will I enjoy today?" to "How will I get through today?"

Being successful at something can pigeonhole you into doing that precise thing over and over again. As a Black Belt, you could say that I've repeated tasks repeatedly as I've followed the methodology, and yet, no two projects have ever been even close. There were always new things to learn. However, I declined when I'd delivered one successful project and was asked to do the same again in another area. The learning opportunity that would have resulted was not significant enough to warrant the time I knew I would need to invest.

Learning on the job is the most popular way adults acquire new knowledge. One of my core strengths is Learner, which means I enjoy gaining knowledge. However, like Goldilocks, there is a balance. Too much learning can overwhelm, lead to a decline in productivity, and leave one feeling exhausted. If there is insufficient learning, there is a risk of irrelevance. Learning things that are non-transferable is a risk. When you've invested, you are more likely to keep investing, even when it's throwing good after bad, and the walls of your comfort zone will keep getting thicker.

### *When you don't have a great relationship with your manager*

I've had two great managers in my life, separated by sixteen years. The first was my first full-time permanent manager, so I had no idea. Without a point of reference, I assumed my experience was average. Since then, I've reported to various managers who could inspire their version of a Dilbert cartoon. If I didn't know that it was possible to have a great boss, I might have put up with situations that should never have existed. Instead, search, and ye shall find.

Great managers care about you and your development. They don't think of you as a resource but a name. You aren't a role to them but a set of skills and strengths. They listen without judgment, demonstrate openness to dissent, and give timely and relevant feedback.

Great managers are your champions; they help break down barriers, provide valuable insights, and have your back. They recognize that they are responsible for shaping the culture of their team and actively contributing to its development. Work is challenging and rewarding.

Great managers exist; some are already in this form, and some are working toward it. However, please don't get stuck with a manager who only looks up the hierarchy and thinks their team is more important than the team they lead.

If you actively manage your network, remain open to new opportunities, and stay informed about your performance, then the decision to move to a new role becomes less monumental. One of people's biggest regrets on death is taking the wrong path. Don't be one of the many who say, "I wish I'd done it earlier." What other indicators do you consider when making career decisions?

### *When you can't make change anymore*

In any role, there is the opportunity for continuous improvement. Early on, continuous improvement is fast and furious as opportunities are apparent and easy to implement. Then, things get more challenging. More effort is required to find and execute things.

When good performance is achieved, things can become burdensome. You need teamwork, influence, leadership, and support to bring about improvements. This is your chance to showcase your unique value, establish a solid reputation, and secure some standout stories for your subsequent interviews.

If you don't have those things and can't get them, it might be time to find new problems. One thing that keeps people in jobs they wish they could leave is the fear of being unable to sell themselves in an interview. Giving successful interviews is a skill that can be practiced and refined with the guidance of a coach. They can help you craft answers, draft resumes and navigate the process.

### *Set Your Mind Set*

Your morning routine should energize you and prepare you for the day ahead. Meditation, gratitude journaling, and exercise are all activities that can help you cultivate a positive mindset. Eliminate the negativity and focus on the positive.

Studies show that we can fake it to make it. Stand in a powerful position, and your testosterone rises, giving you that can-do feeling. Bite a pencil, forcing your mouth into a smile, increasing your happiness. Your external environment can significantly impact your mindset, so dress well and stand with confidence.

What is the most critical and challenging thing you have to do? Do it first, and your day will get easier, not harder. You will build confidence, not apprehension.

To increase ease and enjoyment, avoid starting your day with things that distract you from this goal, such as checking emails and organizing your day.

At the end of every day, record the moments that made you proud. Document what you were able to do that you had doubts about your ability to do. Write down the duties you fulfilled, the steps you took toward your dreams, and the preparations that made the day go more smoothly. When times are more challenging, please take the opportunity to read and reflect on them. Confidence builds when you remind yourself that you've faced challenges and can do it again.

Focus on what you did well and whether anyone else would be impressed. Make yourself proud. Only you know how much effort it took.

As your self-confidence grows, you begin to think of yourself as someone who gets things done, has a great report card, is driven by a higher purpose, and is on track to make your life matter. What do you do to grow your self-confidence?

It's easy to beat yourself up, but when we silence our inner critic and cultivate our inner cheerleader, we will watch our failures diminish, our accomplishments flourish, and the size of the challenges we can take on continue to grow.

Are you focusing on what didn't go right and constructively and consciously building your self-confidence daily? Like a ladder, one accomplishment leads to an increase in your ability to perform the next.

## Handling the Truth

Jack Nicolson's character breaks down while testifying in **A FEW GOOD MEN** and declares, "You can't handle the truth!" Perhaps that's where the film gets its title.

There are big truths, your truths and my truths, and conflict results when they collide. First, there is a lack of awareness about the uniqueness of perspective and how we can all perceive completely different things from one another in the same scene. Second, because the process that determines the big truths isn't exposed or conspicuous, many don't understand what the capital T truth is and what are just some ideas of other human beings who are allowed to have their unique perspectives.

## *The Stigma of Imperfection*

Handling the truth is difficult on an individual level. Then, we are in roles, acting on behalf of a relationship that has already begun. We start judging the other person from ground zero, but that person is already dealing with a place of broken trust based on a fractured truth.

Imagine what might change if you knew that Ivory wasn't 99.44 percent pure (pure what?), that FedEx is one of the world's top performers, and that what they achieve is far, far lower than Ivory's marketing claims. Every day, they can expect what percent won't get their stuff, but the public isn't privy to this performance standard.

As someone subject to truth, lies, and statistics, Oprah says that what was once acceptable in tabloids has become acceptable on the internet. Now, we have a culture centred around salacious content that captures attention, generates revenue, and drives the economy. She says, "I used to marvel that people in nondemocratic countries bought into what was distorted propaganda. Now, we see how it happens. The assaults on truth become increasingly blatant until lies are finally accepted as reality. Say anything loud and long enough, and some people believe it."

Data can be used to move forward instead of finding out who is at fault. In the face of failure, always blame the process and use data to determine what part of the process is at fault. Was it the hiring process and a failure to find an alignment of values? What is weather and an inability to adapt to the

variations mother nature will throw your way? You won't know until you conduct a thorough analysis; you have the data to support that.

Use data not to prove what you think you know but to probe where and how you might be wrong, limited, or narrow-minded. I've been that customer, frustrated by a perceived injustice. To be frustrated is to have a lot of energy to do something and no outlet for it. Eventually, a destination is always found—not always the one that deserves it, originated it, or could benefit from it.

### *Corrective Action*

Whenever there is a mistake, it's an opportunity to improve. You don't like the experience – it feels terrible – so let's ensure it doesn't happen again.

With that mentality, over time, you can get anywhere. How you eat an elephant is one bite at a time, and how you transform one culture from customer aggravation to customer apathy to customer service. First, you must convince them there is room for improvement, which isn't easy when they have workplace awards on the wall. It wasn't until I won my prize that I understood what was happening behind the plaque.

The immediate work we do upon hearing about a service failure is called corrective action. We correct the action that caused the failure. Somehow, getting that parcel out to that bride was required. "Our bad," you say. If you cannot personalize it to your preferences, include the logo on your pay stub. "Let me act right now to make it right." Making it right can range from driving it there yourself to offering to allow the bride to come and pick it up.

If a promise is broken, the corrective action is to tape, glue, or staple it back together the best way Humpty Dumpty's men and women can.

Yes, it costs more than mixing it with the next day's batch. Of course, it takes time and effort. Besides, the big guys ask, what will happen if we lose one customer? They may say she wasn't the deciding party, so she's not our customer.

Remember that David wins if you want to see a David versus Goliath fight. Perhaps not on your watch, maybe not your battle, but the war for transparency, quality, and value is won by the general consumer who pays the long game without taking sides.

Greed prevails, and the cost of unpredictability is the most challenging aspect for any business to overcome. We want to avoid unpredictable people and suppliers, particularly in our profit centers, companies, or investment portfolios.

Aim for consistency, then move the target. If you can't achieve consistency, lower your target until you keep those all-important and ever-transparent promises. Data does that when you use it to manage your performance and are prepared to handle the truth, as ugly as those customers' words sound. It's not personal; it's business, and you are currently not a person but a cog in a vast, impenetrable system that is being presented as the appropriate representative.

Good luck. If you find that experience contemptible, embarrassing, and horrifyingly repetitive, preventive action will be your saving grace.



## *Preventative Action*

Once the bride gets her parcel, preventative action answers, “How could all of this have been avoided?” It’s a question that applies to everyone, not just the bride. If the answers are different for everyone, there is always something you can do for tomorrow.

The customers might change, but if you keep your job, you will still be there, day in and day out.

These questions of improvement are answered in the process of finding it. Everything is a process, from the one of investigation to the one that let this bride down.

A process is a series of steps that transform a substance or object. When the seamstress clipped the last threads, she put the thing into the envelope. In step two, she addressed it and took it to the depot. The depot took possession, and the procedure is already underway.

The procedure consists of a series of steps deemed critical to performance. When you train a new staffer, you don’t have to tell them everything as if they were blind and had just been born yesterday.

Especially for adults, they are not a blank slate. When you tell them the bare minimum and then correct them as necessary, there may come a day when you instruct everyone else to do it the same way the new person does. Don’t let that day pass before it changes your life.

When you train a new employee, you inform them of the information outlined in training documents, auditing checklists, and any other relevant materials that may result in a stern warning, observed punishment, or other forms of maltreatment. In this way, you begin to see that there is one procedure but three processes: the one that management believes in, the one that training promises, and the one that happens.

Preventative action involves discovering and eliminating ambiguity, lack of clarity, or misconceptions about what management wants and rewards. Lower costs? Slam that phone down. Satisfactorily resolved lost tickets? Get in that car. Targets and rewards are powerful uses of data, only one of which is to provide subliminal, if not literal, direction on the compass of improvement. Knowing what change you are directing is the first critical step regarding targets and rewards.

When you don’t measure performance, you don’t even know that phones are being slammed, brides are telling packed audiences about their plights, and that your Director of Quality might be better suited as the Director of Internal Affairs. When someone has a lens of justice, put them where that’s exactly what you’d want them to do. There is a vast difference between internal and external quality, yet we often hear the word ‘quality’ and assign its functions to the same department. The same thing happens when we hear about people development and assign that function to the department bearing the closest sounding name: human resources.

Preventative action is changing something internally. Like Switzerland, it’s a rare and remarkable talent to remain unbiased, undecided, and unanimously interested in what’s best for everyone.

## Protect Your Processes

While mistakes will always occur due to the actions of others, external situations, and forces beyond your control, remember that if they affect you, you must address and resolve them. There is always a safeguard to create, especially for those significant, recurring issues that seem to happen constantly.

What changes when you shift your perspective from viewing the occurrence as a disruption to viewing it as a prediction? If they are likely to mess that up again, what can you do to protect yourself when it happens?

Accept that it might never change. Ok. So, what can you do about it? If a supplier is unpredictable but uniquely qualified, perhaps you need to buffer your inventory. Yes, Lean Manufacturing calls this waste, and it. Your money and space are being tied up. However, unpredictable supply also has costs; if you are stressing about it, consider the expenditure as a form of relaxation, such as a massage. What has been the price, and what will the cost be if the past predicts the future?

Other solutions involve working with the supplier, but at this point, look within your circle of control. Staying with solutions that start and end with you, and only you, is quicker to implement and tends to be more robust. No one will care more about a solution to your problem than you will.

When we recall emotionally potent events—such as mistakes—we often leave out or rearrange the details or embellish recollections with current information. This is why we are at a loss when we try to spot trends without a record. When you need to know, “Why does this keep happening?” check your notes.

Corrective action is taken to repair damage and get back on track. Like turning a steering wheel, it impacts the present to put things right.

But don’t stop there. Take preventative action, and you will be happy not to repeat that. Preventative action changes the process so that the opportunity for the problem will not happen again.

Don’t worry about whether you’re working on the root cause, a symptom, or an effect. Have a reason, and proceed. When you are clear on the problem you are trying to solve and the actions you are taking to solve it, you are prepared to learn how to do it better next time.

## *Bolster Motivation*

Motivation will wane, regardless of why you made your resolution or how committed you were to it. If you’re like me, your motivation is at its highest when you decide to change. However, that initial burst of energy seems gone within a short time.

Things got uncomfortable. Unanticipated roadblocks cropped up. Progress isn’t meeting your expectations.

Do you recall why you initially wanted to make a change? Stay on track by reinvigorating your motivation.

Studies have shown that understanding your reason why will boost motivation. Having a purpose will unleash your drive unconsciously when familiar choices and new directions confront you.

Tapping into emotional reasons you want to change will engage your unconscious brain. Having facts will help justify your emotional reasons and focus your higher-order thinking. This is about you. What *\*do you\** want? Not what your significant other, boss or friends want you to do. You have good reason to want to make them happy, but it isn't as strong as what you want for yourself. It's not selfish; it's a survival instinct.

You can keep this all to yourself, so get as honest as you can. What are the reasons why you wanted to do this? Concrete reminders, such as a vision board or notebook, will keep your reasons fresh.

### *Question Your Defaults*

Technology is powerful stuff—for many of us, more potent than the extent to which we use it. While new apps and tools are emerging daily, you pick your favourites and get to know them well, rather than continually trying the latest. Your email application, search engine, and smartphone operating system might be top.

Knowing Google operators can make anyone's search for information easier. Whatever technology you rely on to make your life easier, take the time to get to know it better. Understand what options and settings make them even more powerful tools for your arsenal.

Whether you need help learning your operating or filing system, a little time spent taking a tutorial is well spent. There may be functions you aren't using that will save you time and potential headaches.

According to Adam Grant's book, **ORIGINALS**, questioning and going against the default is a hallmark of a productive person. For instance, people who use Firefox instead of Internet Explorer tend to be more productive. Why? IE is the default program, but Firefox takes effort. First, you must determine which browser you prefer and then install it. It is a matter of moments, but replacing the default with one that works for you is a rare and remarkable thing to do.

When it comes to technology, question the defaults. Don't say yes to notifications for everything. Give important callers their ringtone. Use the power of space to get you in the right headspace, and your productivity will take care of itself.

While you may not be able to recreate your space within a weekend with a team of experts, dedicating a bit of time daily and knowing your final objective can pay off in spades. The time will pass anyway; it's up to you to make it count. Wherever you work, it should be a place that inspires you to strive for excellence. Let that notion leak into the work you produce.

### *Check Mastery*

When I was working toward my first Six Sigma Black Belt certification, my CEO called me up to ask what I was doing differently, an incident that started me on this journey. I had some ideas then but didn't turn them into a project. I was tapping into experts but not assigning them roles.

Later, I realized my fortunate luck to be assigned a project everyone had given up on. Instead, there were no opinions on how to fix it. That allowed me to trust the process, rely heavily on the tools and techniques, and follow the facts.

After the call, I got curious. I started watching what others were doing and noticed they were falling prey to their mastery. There's a nasty little flaw in our brains- well, more than one- but confirmation bias causes significant problems. This is the tendency to seek to prove what is right, even when you don't realize what you believe or are wrong.

Clarke's Law states, "When a distinguished but elderly scientist states something is possible, he is almost certainly right. When he states that something is impossible, he is very probably wrong."

They'd get to the end of their projects and wonder where the savings went. I had to go up against one of the most brilliant engineers I'd ever met, who said my suggestion would never work. Unfortunately, it did. I say, unfortunately, because although it made a massive difference that inspired the call, I'd made some people feel stupid.

While the experience made me believe that there is no such thing as an unsolvable problem, it also made me realize the importance of understanding what your most prominent stakeholders want from you. Sometimes, they don't like the problem solved.

On Marie TV, Marie Farleo interviews Brené Brown about **BRAVING THE WILDERNESS**. Brown says she lives by the following: "At the end of the day, at the end of the week, at the end of my life, I want to say that I contributed more than I criticized." Criticism is easy; contribution is complex.

Like my grandmother said, "If you have nothing nice to say, don't say anything at all." The real trick is learning how to give it in a way that is received and acted upon.

You might know Toastmasters as a place to learn to speak, but it's also where you learn to give feedback that people can hear and act on. It's not about proving how much more you know; it's about building on their motivation and providing one or two of your observations of which they may not have been aware while telling them four or five things they did well and should continue to do.

## Leverage Triggers

The best way to direct your attention, control your focus and remember your standards is with your environment. You can intentionally design triggers that help and remove the ones that hurt.

Architecting your environment will have three steps. First, you need to anticipate how the environment may undermine your performance and learn how to utilize it to support your goals. Next, you will avoid conditions you know will have a negative impact, and last, you will adjust based on what you learn. Plan it, do it and check what you've learned. Let's unpack each of these three.

## Anticipation

The more concrete we get, the better we are at forecasting, but we are more likely to avoid daydreaming about potential possibilities altogether. Planning isn't something we value.

When it matters, we put in the effort. You'll notice what happens when we do that. We take out notebooks and planners, write to-do lists, and imagine decision trees. It gets concrete.

You've already learned about prizing action over inaction, and planning falls mainly into the inaction zone until you are serious about it. We're given messages that planning doesn't matter because it falls apart in the face of the enemy or we don't do a good job, so why bother? Bother because you know the future is coming and want to be prepared to face it. What futures are coming that you want to be prepared to conquer?

These reasons will include what you want to move away from and what you want to move toward. When you move away from something, you want to be looking through the front windshield at where you are headed, not in the rearview mirror watching it fade from view. When we want to take on new actions, we must make room for them by letting something else go.

Did you make enough room for your change? What would you give up if you needed more time, energy, or resources to make that happen?

Having rewards on the horizon is helpful, but their power lies in the value you place on them and the likelihood of achieving them. If you have a high reward but a low belief in your probability of success, consider a lower reward that you are confident you can achieve.

Don't limit yourself to one reward, but pepper the journey of change with rewards along the way. Don't let your expectations of losses hold you back, either. Identify what you will lose with your change, and treat both losses and gains as positives and negatives. Find the silver lining to turn them into gains as well.

Take a moment now to draft the first draft of the table. It's hard to identify all our reasons in one sitting. We experience them in fleeting moments, buried memories and blocked experiences. Similarly, don't try to get it all right and all down in one sitting – it may be too much to handle. Instead, get started, keep it handy, and update and review it as needed.

## *Avoidance*

A coffee shop or public location may not be ideal for communication work, such as writing articles or drafting speeches. Accidentally, you might inject a phrase you overhear for the one you thought you wrote. A quiet, comfortable spot might be more suitable for deep concentration work.

Avoidance is ensuring you never have to make the choice. People trying to cut down on their drinking don't hang around bars, gamblers don't hang out at racetracks, and athletes hang out with other athletes who think it's normal to get up at 4 am for practice.

When it represents a weakness, avoid it. Do not assume that willpower will be there to help you out. We want to rely on avoidance far before we rely on willpower.

Avoidance means steering clear of temptation. Like the preschoolers who didn't look at the marshmallow, taking something out of your field of vision is the first line of defence. Licking it, as one child did, might be like playing with fire. This is another instance where you must know what to avoid.

## Adjustment

When results and feedback are required to improve, the question is not if you will fail, but can you fail faster? For instance, if you face a presentation requiring your public speaking skills that may not be polished, maybe you can join a Toastmasters group to get experience speaking every week. Practice makes perfect, they say. You can practice your presentation, which will get you perfect at that one presentation, or you can broaden the skill base.

This past year had me in another situation, thanks to the salt-shaker world of software updates. Scheduled to present to a packed audience, I arrived thirty minutes early and powered up my laptop. That morning was a chosen update morning for Windows 10. After 10 minutes, the progress bar moved from 0 percent to 1 percent, so I needed a Plan B. Thankfully, I could borrow a laptop from an organizer, find my file in the cloud, and get up and running on time. Strangers are friends we haven't met yet.

When it comes to software updates, I don't like change. But it's not the change I dislike; the timing, the cold-water introduction, and other aspects create stress without benefit. You can do a lot to make change more manageable for those affected.

Learning from our mistakes, failures, experiences, or whatever you want to call them ensures that slip-ups happen only once. It takes time and distance to get this right, thanks to perspective, memory, and our emotional involvement in the scenario.

You might have to try a few coffee shops, libraries or desks until you find your Goldilocks fit. Then, one day, it won't be the right one anymore.

Adaptive behaviours work until they become maladaptive. It happens because time changes and takes everything with it. We grow and change, places morph and get remodelled, and the core and essence of our work change. Periodically, we must assess how well things work for us, learn different ways, try them out and stick with what works.

It might not be the third try that works. It might take a few more tries. Perseverance is the willingness to try again because the breakthrough might come next.

From the triggers that prompt people to act to error-proofing devices, you can leverage design to ensure success, which is limited only by your imagination. As time changes, it takes everything with it, so everything you rely on remains the same; you must take measures to ensure it stays that way.

For instance, everything related to recruitment changed in the call center, from posting to role design. Those changes were reflected in updated policies, procedures, and documents. However, paper can only go so far. The training everyone received today is excellent, but what happens when there is turnover?

Considering how things change over time, you can better predict the support you need now to ensure things don't fall off the rails later. Predict it to prevent it.

## Use Math and Emotion

What if you knew that, no matter how unique your vision is, there is a way to achieve seemingly impossible dreams? There is a path you can follow to get you there. Like any path, achieving your dream

is merely taking the next step. The trick to accomplishing impossible dreams is not following the route but finding it.

Are you utilizing technology to its fullest potential? You should see it as an assistant that makes your job easier, helps you become more focused, and eliminates the noise and distraction that come with unique work.

Even when we have the right software, we fail to implement it effectively or learn how to use it properly. Worse, we invest so much money into it that we feel shackled to it. Dysfunctional technology leads to dysfunctional processes. Fixing them starts to look too complicated, too expensive, and too risky even to try.

Doing the cost/benefit analysis might paralyze your dreams from the beginning.

### Kick-Start Development

With confirmation bias, cognitive dissonance, and your intentions to suppress and ignore your emotional or gut reactions, a lot of scheming can occur in that seven-second window before your awareness. Awareness is a blind servant and will gather all the logical data, creating the charts you need. Intuition and instinct are your higher power to stop before you run off and fill your day with activity. Ask yourself what you expect to find, and when you do, what you will do about it.

When you start by assuming success, you can jump right into the context of presenting that information. What will your naysayers say? What would your mentor advise? Please start with the end in mind, as Stephen Covey suggests in his book, **THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE PEOPLE**.

### Observe Behaviour

When we act out of instinct, we have different rationalization options available. How we are the same and how we are different is a question we must ask ourselves. Either way, once you start to notice how things are the same, over and over again, you see it in yourself, in others, and in your work habits.

Behavioural economics is a branch of study that involves putting people in situations and observing their behaviour. This requires no assumptions whatsoever. In the past, economics was based on the belief that people were rational actors—that you and I looked at a situation, calculated how we were better off, and made that logical choice.

More and more, the library of ways we do the opposite, or curious alternatives, is being catalogued and explained. To think there are good people and bad, intelligent or not, is going the way of the dodo bird or people who believe in a flat earth.

Scientists have shown that decisions are made up to seven seconds before you are aware of having made a decision. In that time, you aren't doing calculations and corrections; you are finding proof. By the time you are aware, you jump on the proof bandwagon.

Consciousness is the ability to derail the bandwagon, and it begins by realizing which track you've already chosen, backing up to the point of choice, and then conducting a deliberate analysis.

Sometimes, people say, “Yes, I will do that,” but I know they have just done a mental double-take and changed their minds.

They’ve accepted a new future they haven’t yet experienced because they know all about the old one. Some people say that the devil they know is better than the one they haven’t experienced yet, and that’s fear talking. Of course, it’s fear when you are invoking the devil. New experiences are also novel experiences, and the brain loves novelty. Will it be the love of novelty or the fear of ambiguity?

### *Edit Kindly*

Leaders need to have the guts to face and accept the truth. I’m not willing to follow that kind of leadership. Not doing that is getting run over by the bus of progress that’s been honking for you to get out of the way.

It is also worth pointing out that science can never prove what is right. The best it can strive to achieve is to disprove wrong ideas. That’s the easy part. Now, you have to go forth and lead.

Jeff Bezos was lucky to learn early that his cleverness would hold him back unless he did something about it. Like me, you might have learned that your cleverness will hold you back, and then you decided not to be clever. Whether you are minimizing yourself like I did or accidentally causing more problems than you are solving, using your cleverness in the right way will stop holding you back.

Jeff Bezos, CEO of Amazon, tells the Princeton Class of 2010 about his cleverness getting him in trouble. As a boy, he was with his grandparents for the summer. When he was about 10, they travelled with their Airstream trailer. He was in the back seat, and his grandparents were in the front. His grandmother smoked, and he hated the smell.

Obsessed with calculations, he’d figure out “useless statistics” on things like grocery spending, gas mileage, and, on this day, smoking. He heard that every puff of a cigarette takes some minutes of your life. He got to work calculating and finally tapped his grandmother on the shoulder. He said, “At two minutes per puff, you’ve taken nine years off your life!”

He expected to be applauded for his cleverness. Instead, his grandmother burst into tears. Gently and calmly, his grandfather told him, “Jeff, one day you’ll understand that it’s harder to be kind than clever.”

Bezos told the class, “Cleverness is a gift; kindness is a choice.” Having the courage to face and redirect our dysfunctional desires for good is also a choice.

### *Communicate Clearly*

When I did something similar as a kid, someone said, “No one is going to like you because you make people feel dumb.” This started my journey of minimizing myself to make others more comfortable, not raising my hand in class, and intentionally answering some questions incorrectly.

Now, when I tell people I teach them how to work smarter, some respond with offence. “Are you implying I am working dumb?” I’ve realized that the people who get offended aren’t my audience. My people are the ones who know the opposite; it isn’t dumb, but it’s hard. They are tired of working too



hard. Dumb doesn't cross their minds because they are grounded in their knowledge domain. They are always looking for ways to do things faster and better.

Some aren't. Some believe that they can't possibly be more productive. Their unshakeable belief in their cleverness will close their eyes to the possibility. They will continue to sacrifice their evenings and weekends. The status quo will rule until an external event forces them to change. These external events happen more frequently and with less and less warning.

## Thrive Through Transition

You can thrive through transition, whether the change is welcome and sought after or sudden and lousy. Transition is the journey from one mode of being into a new one. Life events such as moving, marriage, and middle age call on our identities, problem-solving skills, and ability to adapt and deal with ambiguity.

There are many life changes that we don't choose, and sometimes that is marvellous. From new neighbours who become wonderful friends to new promotions that become dream jobs, there are times when change happens to us, and we feel abundantly lucky. Other times are not so rosy. Either way, you must understand what to expect to thrive through the transition.

Seemingly good or bad, here's what you need to know to deal effectively with change.

### *Know You've Done It Before (and can do it again)*

If there is one truth of life, it's that transitions occur. You can't avoid aging; transitions are inextricably linked to it. You can avoid growing, and the transitions of choice can be avoided. Those who avoid transitions also avoid increasing the size of their lives. That's not you. You've made transition choices and will likely make them again. You'll only get better at it.

We all bring personal styles, fears, and interests to transitions and how we undergo them. However, if anyone else has done it, it doesn't matter. We compare our previous experiences to the one at hand. It's within you to tackle the frustrations, challenges, and opportunities you face. You are prepared and able, but that doesn't mean you must do it alone.

Let go of your expectations of how you think you should feel and allow yourself to experience it, if only for your own sake. If you aren't sure how to name it or what to do with it, professionals who have learned and practiced this material and gained extensive experience from various perspectives can help you work through it.

With some transitions, it's easier to see what is ending. When a job ends, a title, a set agenda, an income, and relationships are lost.

With things that appear as fresh beginnings, it can be more challenging to see what is ending until the realization comes later. New parents focus on the addition and can forget to visit the loss of the independent twosome, the carefree life and the well-rested days.

When we forget to acknowledge that some things are coming to an end and identify what those things are, they can lie in wait to catch us off guard later. These things wake us at 3 a.m. with regrets that fade

in the light of day. To minimize those nights, we aim to identify, celebrate, and address the issues that require prompt and appropriate attention.

With endings, rituals help mark the occasion. They celebrate achievements, mark change, and create a line between the past and the future. Craft your ritual in a way that helps celebrate the ending. Even when we don't choose our endings, paying respect to the past with appreciation and gratitude can help us move forward.

### *Embrace the Murky Middle*

Dealing with a change you didn't choose often means an extended period in the murky middle, but this is unavoidable even when it is selected.

When it's a change of your choosing, your murky middle might start before anyone can see anything on the outside. Some discontentment will become undeniable to you. You are no longer 100 percent committed to the future your path is on, so you start to slow down and disengage.

In the murky middle, we engage in much inner work. We evaluate our past choices, dig deep for new possibilities, and observe life and our reactions. It takes a lot of time alone, and that's not always something people can afford to prioritize.

Meditation is a practice that can help you connect with your thoughts and desires. It's not about keeping a blank mind but noticing what you think as a nonjudgmental observer. It's an excellent way to get to know yourself.

Skipping the work of the murky middle means change becomes cyclical rather than spirals building on top of each other. When we see patterns of making the same choices or getting the same problems, it's a sign we've been caught in a circle instead of a spiral. The spiral is a life that becomes increasingly authentic. The circle is a life that is simply a multiple of repetitions.

Know this - for every ending, there is a beginning, and likewise.

Just as rituals help put the past behind us, new beginnings deserve to be marked. They can serve as emotional preparation for what's to come – mainly because you aren't entirely sure about what that might entail.

New beginnings will require learning new things. Like a child, new beginnings are more straightforward when you greet the uncertainty with promise, adventure and excitement. As you've found, the reality of that new beginning often does not match the expectation. But that's part of the adventure.

### *Update Your Answers*

Updating your trivia is also part of this adventure. When our lives change, answers to common questions change. The old trivia needs to be updated. If you move to a new town, suddenly you need new answers to even the most mundane questions, like where you like to eat. This list of trivia is long, and the moments when you realize you need a new answer can be jarring. Even practicing new answers can be painful until they are second nature. But remember, you've made it through before.

In the case of your identity, you've probably tried on a few already. You've expressed it in your appearance, how you relate to people, and company. You are not the same person you were yesterday, and tomorrow, you will be older and wiser than you are right now (and not just because you are reading this post).

A change is an opportunity to bring you closer to your authentic identity. For lottery winners, if they continue to define themselves and their comfort zones by limited wealth, they will lose it all. Brian Tracy refers to this phenomenon as self-concept. He tells of salespeople with predefined income targets who can't earn more than that mark, even if they achieve it early in the year.

Transitions will cause you to reflect on who you think you are and who you are. You might leave a specific identity behind because you discover one that is truer to you. If you lose your job, you may lose your identity as an employee. That might open new possibilities for you or make you realize that an employee is precisely who you are, and becoming one again will be a natural and easy thing for you.

With the promotion, we quickly adopt new identities. Over time, we realize how far-reaching that new identity can be. We might be working more hours, reporting to new people, or expected to dress and act differently. What's ended is a degree of comfort and competence that earned that promotion. Your new identity must regain the platform of comfort and competence.

What looks terrible now may turn out to be the best thing that ever happened to you. Life is change. Leaving judgment out is part of the art of carrying on. At any point in your life, you will experience these phases. Like seasons, life is lived to its fullest when you embrace every moment.

## Accomplish Impossible Dreams

Your dream to be the first, the only, and the best is the exact right dream. The fact that no one has gone there before can make it seem impossible. You would be in good company.

In business, the best place to be is in a blue ocean. Contrary to a red ocean, where sharks compete over a small pool of customers, a blue ocean is defined as having no competition, being the sole provider of a unique space where customers flock. For you, the best place to be is a blue ocean - the unique person you were born to be, achieving the unique things that only you can accomplish, utilizing your unique talents that only you possess. So, how do you accomplish impossible dreams?

Ford said, "Whether you think you can or can't, you're right." Perhaps you have heard of the rate of change in breaking running records. It wasn't until 1954 that Roger Bannister broke the four-minute mile barrier, which was considered impossible until then. The previous record of only a second over four minutes stood for nine years. Since then, it has been broken numerous times and is now so familiar that it is considered the standard for male middle-distance runners.

What you believe about what is possible or impossible will make it so. Remember the Olympics and the subtle difference between "Impossible" and "I'm possible." First, believe you can do it. Start by building your self-confidence and finding your inner Roger.

Isaac Newton said, "If I have seen further, it is because I stand on the shoulders of giants." Stand on the shoulders of giants to accomplish your impossible, and keep your eyes on your vision.

## *Stumble Away*

Some detours are scenic. If you reflect on the experience, was there something delightful you would have missed if all had gone your way? According to Daniel Gilbert, happiness is something we have to stumble upon, so we should strive to stumble upon it. Scenic detours might expose you to a new goal, plan, or tactic.

Some detours are shortcuts. Maybe you don't need whatever was behind the door that closed. For startups, perfection can be behind that door. As Eric Ries advises in *The Lean Startup*, think "minimum viable," or as Tim Ferriss puts it, "minimum effective dose." I realized I didn't need more practice, permission or perfection. I gained the confidence to pick myself up, as Seth Godin advises, a lot sooner than I otherwise would have. It was just one of those pushes that life gives us when we need it that can help us get unstuck in a jiff.

Some detours are in place to facilitate more fundamental change. That significant change may be happening inside you or in external shifts. Perhaps it's not ready for you to get there, even if you're unwilling. Like Katy Perry sings, "Maybe a reason why all the doors are closed / So you can open one that leads you to the perfect road."

Second, focus on identifying the best possible outcome. Wherever you are, whatever reason your plans were frustrated, don't get frustrated yourself. Instead, ask yourself, "What's the best possible outcome?"

You may find your imagination and attention drawn toward the ideals of a perfect result. If so, great, but then take it down a notch until it doesn't depend on a miracle.

Your heart may scream for a just or fair outcome. People have frequently told me that life isn't fair, seemingly always by those who ensure it. You may not witness justice happen, and you can't even rely on the justice system, either. Instead, know that "the arc of the moral universe is long, but bends toward justice," as Martin Luther King Jr observed.

## *Adjust to Possibility*

Possible means it is also realistic. When your vision crumbles, it might have been because it was an unrealistic view based on an impossibility or impracticality. In whichever way someone treats you, expect that treatment to continue. You know what is realistic for you, and you can be realistic about the expectations others have of you. Use the past to inform your predictions and establish a solid foundation. Inject a bit of creativity into your new possibilities. This unexpected change might bring you new ideas. Be deliberate about seeing and using new ideas.

Third and last, it causes some change. Please don't look only for the silver lining. You risk accepting the outcome as unchangeable and only change your attitude. Yes, take what you cannot change, but know that life is more mutable than you think; you have more power than you believe and more influence than you appreciate.

When your vision crumbles, recognize that it is just the reflection of one path. There's more than one way to get where you want to go. If forward is not an option, use one of the other 359 degrees.

Adopt an attitude of curiosity and non-judgment, and you will tap into creativity and logic you didn't know you had. Recruit insiders and outsiders for their perspectives until you have enough input to create your best possible outcome. Then make it happen. Like Terry Fox, keep your focus on the best possible outcome.

Remember, when your vision crumbles, your plans may be foiled, but you are still a firework. I like to recall that you deserve the best. Ask, 'What is the kindest, fairest, noblest, and most generous way to proceed?' Let the answer guide you; you can't end up in the wrong place."

When your vision crumbles, how can you reframe it and rekindle it?

### *Carry On*

Everyone could use guidance in a world of uncertainty and unfathomable events. Have you ever thought the future would unfold a certain way, only to see your vision crumble? Things in life don't always work out how we think they will.

Maybe promises aren't kept, rules are changed, or the rug is pulled out from under you for whatever reason. A few months ago, I took a job I thought would be the best in my life. I would get to fix broken departments. I had done this throughout my career, but this time, I thought I would get a chance to do it my way. Fast forward several months later, and I was doing nothing. This is a dream job for some people – getting paid to show up. For me, it felt a lot more like jail.

Sometimes, the vision crumbles without warning. Jesse Lyn Stoner's portrayal of Terry Fox's response to his own experience is an inspiring example of leadership. Here's what I've learned from my experiences.

First, don't call it a failure. Call it a foil, and it's just a detour. It's just the next problem to solve. Before you replace that vision too quickly, take advantage of the opportunity.

Failure is final. It's the not getting back up again that defines it as such. The difference between success and failure can be highly dependent on timing. Many so-called failed experiments have led to significant breakthroughs, such as the discovery of penicillin.

Other people who have achieved great success often regret their contributions. The Wright Brothers thought planes would bring peace, only to see them used as instruments of destruction. Failure can turn into success, and success can turn into failure. It is hard to see how anything can be so black and white as success and failure in this murky world.

Failure carries the stigma of something shameful to be avoided. The only way to progress is to try new things. Of course, we need to be smart about what we try and how to learn as much as possible. Taking the risk comes at a cost.

While we can minimize that loss, we still want to ensure we get the most out of our investment. You put something into getting where you are right now. It may be a matter of time, education, or effort. Whatever it is, you might as well make it pay off because there's always value when you look for it.

## References

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<sup>1</sup> (Jamil Zaki, 2011)