

# Better Business Focus

December 2019

Expert inspiration for a Better Business



Better Business Focus is the essential key for business owners and managers. It achieves that by focusing on the way in which successful businesses compete and manage their organisations. It focuses on how people are recruited, coached and developed; on how marketing and selling is undertaken in professional markets as well as in markets with intense competition; on how technology and the Internet is reshaping the face of domestic and home business; and on how people are being equipped with new skills and techniques. In short, it offers expert inspiration for a better business.

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John Niland

# Your next career: Developing self-worth with others?

As more and more people live through times of change and insecurity; many find that the roots of self-esteem do not go deep enough. Showing them how to cultivate deeper roots of unconditional self-worth will be a valued service to leaders, independent professionals, universities, colleges and millions of people in career transition. Could this be your next career?

In more ways than one, we are living through a hurricane season. The tsunami of change is affecting everyone: seasoned professionals, young adults, corporate managers and even veteran entrepreneurs are all experiencing their own brand of uncertainty and “interesting” times.

During times of unprecedented change, there are many practical effects:

- Some people “freeze” and stop taking action: particularly those actions that require creativity or courageous thought;
- Many seek escape or fresh pastures: a recent survey reported that 46% of Millennials are expected to leave their current job within the next twelve months;
- Some take shelter in blaming others: their colleagues, another team, competitors, immigrants, etc;
- A few manage to manipulate these tensions for their own advantage (sound familiar?). Not just in politics, this happens in organisations, too;
- Entrepreneurs and people in business-development have to work harder than ever to fill their pipelines;

- There are many setbacks, changes-of-plan and disappointments to deal with: testing everyone’s resilience;

Many become discouraged and resigned: “what’s the point!”. Depression sets in, diminishing the capacity to act.

### Why self-worth makes a difference

Of course, self-esteem is valuable. For example, when a person reflects on their strengths and achievements, it often inspires fresh hope and empowers them to act. Self-esteem will often get people through a temporary squall in life or in career.

But when faced with repeated setbacks or prolonged uncertainty, then unconditional self-worth becomes more important than conditional self-esteem. In those times, you need roots that go down to the groundwater supply, so that you are not dependent on variable surface-level weather conditions. I’ve written about this more extensively in [The Self-Worth Safari](#).

Here is a quick summary of the benefits of self-worth:

- **People bounce back more quickly from setbacks**, as they are less likely to reproach themselves (or others) for things that didn’t work out.
- **Performance therefore improves**, as energy gets focused on real work rather than blaming oneself, or endless self-preoccupation.
- **People are better able to focus on how they can contribute**, rather than incessant self-appraisal and the need for constant positive feedback.

- **As a result, creativity is enhanced**. As people come off the drug of self-preoccupation, they find fresh angles and new approaches to problems.
- **Nearly everyone experiences a new sense of lightness and joy**, irrespective of what is going on around them. As one person put it, it’s a relief to get rid of the burden of “proving yourself”.

### A real life example

Peter (not his real name) is a young professional working in a mid-sized service organisation where there are constant waves of re-organisation. Everyone around him is suffering from insecurity and very keen to prove themselves and show how they are clever. Some don’t even hesitate to claim the successes of others as their own.

Having made the transition from self-esteem to self-worth, Peter is no longer feeling stressed about all this. Detaching from internal politics, he has turned his attention towards the issues of customers who are also grappling with a changed world.

Building on his natural talent for curiosity, he’s recently uncovered a real opportunity on which is his firm can capitalise. As a result, Peter has been fast-tracked for promotion.

### Developing Self-Worth

Whether it’s the professional negotiating fees, or the graduate looking for job interviews, or the young woman appointed as manager in a male-dominated team, or the twice-made-redundant project-manager who needs to reinvent himself... a lot

of people can benefit from self-worth in a changing world. How can you help them? At Self-Worth Academy, we see many promising career options ahead for those who can empower others to deepen their roots of self-worth in practical ways.

Consider for example:

1. The plight of many students at second and third-level, obsessed with grades and proving themselves. One look at student suicide statistics should be enough to reveal the scale of the self-esteem problem with young people.
2. The world of marketing and business-development has changed fundamentally in the past decade and will continue to do so. Supporting sales professionals and independents in both human and practical ways represents an ongoing need, that is not going away.
3. Managers will struggle to engage talented people, given the significant number of people who no longer want traditional "jobs". Those who master the art of self-worth (and self-esteem) will have an advantage in human-centred leadership.
4. The number of people in career-transition will continue to grow. Self-worth is particularly relevant when people are in transition, because their identity is vulnerable as they cross the river from one career to another.
5. From what we've seen at Self-Worth Academy, self-worth is a particularly hot topic for women: in leadership, entrepreneurship and also in relationships.

6. Young professionals still in their first jobs are naturally keen to prove themselves. Like Peter above, this can be a limiting perspective. Many find fresh lightness and creativity when they root their identity in unconditional self-worth.
7. When people are first appointed to management positions, this often brings a significant shift in the relationship to their former peers.... and also a certain amount of isolation. Self-worth is particularly relevant at this point in professional life.

As many studies show, loneliness is in the increase throughout many parts of society. Self-worth can be a nourishing foundation on which to do something about that.

Whatever the season or the climate, people need deep roots to sustain them during turbulent times. For at least three generations now, we've been educated in a culture of self-esteem. Supporting people to shift to new soil is both a meaningful and inspiring way to make a living.

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#### About the Author

John Niland is best-known as a conference speaker on doing higher value work and creating more opportunity via better conversations. His passion is energising people: boosting growth through higher energy levels, that in turn leads to better dialogue and business growth. Since 2000, John has been coaching others to achieve success, with a particular passion for supporting professionals "who wish to contribute rather than just to win, and hence do higher value work via better conversations with clients and colleagues".

In parallel, John is one of the co-founders of the European Forum of Independent Professionals, following twelve years of coaching >550 professionals to create more value in their work. Author of *The Courage to Ask* (together with Kate Daly), *Hidden Value* and *100 Tips to Find Time*.

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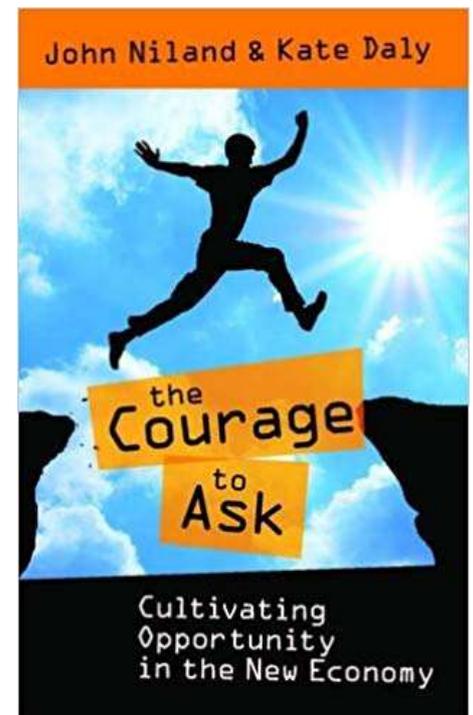
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Paul Sloane

# Focus on the problem, not the customer's request

The best innovations solve real problems. They provide solutions that customers are prepared to pay money for. So, it seems to make sense that we should listen carefully to customer requests.

But this can be a mistake. In the famous words of Steve Jobs, "It isn't the customer's job to know what they want." The customer will often express the kind of solution he would like to see.

Listen politely to his request but spend time observing the problem at first hand. Then think laterally about how to solve it.

In his seminal book, *The Innovator's Dilemma*, Clayton Christensen explains why so many companies fail with their innovations. They make the classic mistake of listening to their customers. Customers are typically unadventurous and unimaginative when it comes to ideas. They ask for incremental innovations to your current offerings. "Please make your product faster, quieter, cheaper, more energy efficient, available in local language etc." This leads companies to keep trying to improve the quality and effectiveness of their current products or services. It leads them away from trying bold new initiatives or alternative approaches. What is more, customers are initially reluctant to adopt radical new solutions until eventually it becomes clear that they are the new hot product.

Consider this recent remarkable innovation from Mexico – **the road that repairs itself**. With a mix of additives and old rubber tires, the new pavement creates a putty that reacts to water. When water hits the road, the putty makes calcium silicates that fill any cracks, producing a constantly

self-repairing road. Do you think the customer asked for this? I don't. The customer probably asked for a better road surface which would last longer. The problem is holes in the road. The inventor focussed on that and came up with a remarkable innovation.

It is the same story with other big innovations. Spectacle wearers did not ask for disks to fit on their eyes – but contact lenses were a big success. Mobile phone users and laptop users wanted higher performance and lower prices.

None asked for a hybrid device. But Steve Jobs introduced the iPad tablet. It was initially greeted with some scepticism but went on to be an enormous winner. Surveys of taxi users showed that they wanted more availability of taxis and lower prices. The obvious answer is to issue more licences for taxis. The real problem is how to significantly increase the supply of customised transport. Travis Kalanick created an entirely new model, Uber, based on the spare capacity of drivers who are happy to give someone a lift for a payment. So, by all means involve the customer. Run your surveys, focus groups and questionnaires. But treat the outputs with care. They are signals to be aware of, not signposts that you must follow. It is not always best to give customers what they ask for. It is better to solve the problem in a clever, effective and innovative way.

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## About the Author

**Paul Sloane** is an author and expert on lateral thinking in business. He has delivered hundreds of talks to executive audiences around the world. His talks are different because they challenge your thinking head-on. He is a skilled facilitator and course leader who helps top level teams achieve breakthrough results in their meetings. He helps companies overcome the problems they have making innovation happen. He can improve creativity and lateral thinking for leaders with leadership and innovation master classes. This results in a more agile culture, more ideas and successful innovation.

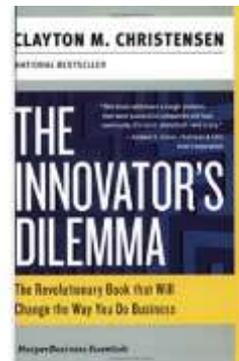
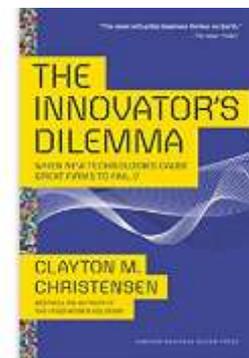
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Tom Koulopoulos

## If you want to get paid to speak – here's how

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There's all sorts of advice on how to be a better speaker, but advice on how to be a professional speaker is pretty dismal. Here are 8 steps for building a sustainable business as a professional speaker.

I've been on the professional speaking circuit for the past 30 years. During that time I've developed an immense sense of gratitude to be fortunate enough to do what I love to do. Whatever else is going on professionally or personally, having the opportunity to regularly take to the stage has provided an unwavering center of gravity in my life.

Along the way I've also learned a thing or two about what makes the professional speaking industry tick and how to build a sustainable presence on the professional speaking circuit.

Trying to distil all of that learning into a few hundred words isn't possible, but what I can do is help you to understand the cornerstones of a sustainable speaking business. Note that my emphasis is on sustainability. Landing a single professional speaking gig now and then is easy. Doing it year in year out for a few decades is something else altogether.

Fair warning at the outset, the eight points I'm about to share will be blunt and unapologetic, and I'm not going to focus on how to become a more effective speaker. I've helped many colleagues and friends navigate the speaking business. The one thing I've come to realize is that you cannot teach someone how to be authentic and engaging. I

know that there are dozens of programs out there that claim to help you launch a speaking career. I've looked at them all. The vast majority focus on how to be a more effective speaker, not on the business of speaking.

I have a deep-rooted dislike for programmatic or formulaic get-rich-speaking approaches that promise to make you a successful speaker over the course of just a few days, weeks, or even months. That's because the foundational cornerstones of a speaking career involve things that take years and decades. Once you have these cornerstones in place you can spend a lifetime fine-tuning your stage presence and style, but that's actually the easy part.

By the way, if you google any of the purported big money speakers who run workshops or seminars on how to get paid to speak you'll come up empty handed. Nada. They're peddling the worst sort of snake oil there is, made up of hype and hope. This isn't about either, it's about hard work.

I can tell you first hand from the professional speakers I've coached—from a prominent neuroscientist, to a professional athlete and heart transplant survivor, to the drummer for one of the world's most successful rock bands—they've all put incredible time and energy into building their speaking careers. There just aren't any shortcuts in this business.

So, with that said, here are the eight cornerstones. By the way, you eventually will need to have all eight of these in place. No shortcuts, remember?

### 1) Before you speak, write a book.

I really don't care how compelling, engaging, or entertaining you think you are, unless you've just landed a plane on the Hudson you need a book as a calling card. Without a published book you're simply not going to be taken seriously enough to warrant anything other than Kiwanis club gigs and fees. Your book is your calling card. It's what gives you license to be listened to.

If that scared you off you're really not going to like part B of this first piece of advice; keep writing books! You need to crank out a new book every 2-3 years in order to stay relevant, keep your material fresh, and demonstrate a commitment to your topic. You can't feign knowledge and passion for a subject. If you're getting paid to speak then you'd better invest in being at the bleeding edge of whatever it is you're speaking about. Nothing does that like having to research and write a new book. Also, do yourself a really big favour and stop thinking that you'll just have it ghost written. You might as well have your ghost writer be your ghost speaker.

### 2) Create a great video reel.

People I advise on professional speaking almost always push back on this. Yet, it is the single most important piece of marketing collateral you have. Unless you're in the nightly news where people can see and hear you, they will have only one way to vet and compare you to other speakers—your video reel. Most aspiring speakers don't like this because it's a catch 22. How do you create a great speaking reel if you're not doing a lot of big

stage speaking? I get it, but that's exactly why you need it. Not having a great speaking video reel means you're not doing much great speaking. All I can say is get creative and get it done.

Don't overproduce it with effects and images. People who are going to book you want to see you. Keep in mind that the venue your video is shot at will define the sort of venue people expect you to speak at. In other words, shoot yourself on a large stage, not a non-nondescript hotel room with low ceilings and a projector you're constantly walking in front of; you know, the kind that's best suited for shadow puppets.

### 3) Build solid relationships with the speakers' bureaus.

There are hundreds of speakers bureaus, but only a dozen or so represent the overwhelming majority of gigs booked. By the way, speakers bureaus book well over 90% of all gigs with a net speakers fee of over \$15,000. So, unless you're aspiring to less, getting to know the bureaus and having them pitch you is critical to building a serious speaking platform. Speakers bureaus build deep relationships with event organizers. But they also go back to speakers who they know will deliver results by knocking it out of the park every time.

Event organizers trust their recommendations. Even if you do go direct and try to book your own gigs, you do not want to be negotiating your own fees. Nothing is more awkward or ineffective. Working with a bureau avoids that. Yes, they take a cut. Yes, it's worth it.

### 4) Once you book a gig it's gospel—there's no backing out.

In twenty years and thousands of gigs I've only once had to cancel due to a fall that immobilized me for a solid week. I've travelled to gigs while I've had pneumonia, I've postponed funerals, missed countless social obligations, even sacrificed a few relationships because of the insane schedule I

keep. When an event is built around you and you have a few hundred or a few thousand people expecting you to show up, as well as an event organizer whose job depends on putting on a show with you as the main attraction, there is no way out. None. Sounds harsh, right? It is, but don't forget that you have been given the privilege of doing something so few people will have the opportunity to do. Be grateful. Respect the obligation. If you don't like it, don't speak.

### 5) Build a brand that's uniquely yours.

What are you? Why are you better able than anyone else to pull this off? What's your narrative? Pedigree? Battle wound? The biggest single challenge facing the overwhelming mass of want-to-be speakers is that they do not have a unique identity and brand. I'll give you a hint on branding, unless you've climbed the world's seven tallest peaks or just landed a few gold medals in the Olympics your brand is not that of a motivational speaker. Be specific in what and who you are. You are creating a product that needs to stand out on a shelf with hundreds of others. Reinforce that brand with the speakers bureaus and your tribe regularly and relentlessly.

### 6) Really, really love what you do and be grateful for it.

Okay, I know this one sounds trite. It's not. In fact, it's without a doubt the most important cornerstone of a sustainable speaking career. When I say love what you do I mean wake up every day in anticipation of your next gig. Treat each gig, the people who are paying for you to be there, and your audience with the respect you'd reserve for the most important people in your life. Sure, you've worked hard to get to this point but lots of people have worked hard and don't get the opportunity to be paid to stand up on a stage and be listened to. Never stop being grateful for that privilege.

### 7) Get ready to deal with lots of rejection.

The professional speaking business is overflowing with speakers. For every gig you land there will be at least 4-8 that show an interest but who—to use the catch phrase popular in the industry – “went in another direction!” Unlike any other case where you're bidding for a job, you will rarely if ever know why you weren't chosen. It's one thing to be turned down for reasons you can address, another altogether to be told nothing. It's like playing darts with a blindfold on and only being told if you hit a bullseye or not. For all you know your darts could all be stuck in the ceiling or laying on the floor.

### 8) Never, ever, ever stop learning.

For me one of the most valuable aspects of being a professional speaker is that I am constantly being forced outside of my comfort zone to learn about new industries and innovations. I can't imagine being a professional speaker without also being as fully immersed in the evolution of technology and business through my writing, research, and consulting.

Constantly being exposed to new trends, innovation, and investments through my business allows me to speak with credibility and authority. So, if you think that you can just speak without simultaneously being at the cutting edge of whatever you're speaking about, well, good luck with that. Unlike Don Henley, you can't show up and just keep singing Hotel California. (Yeah, I'm envious too. That's life.)

That's it!

If any of that scares you off then maybe this just isn't your gig. Nothing at all wrong with that. It's better that you know now what sort of investment and commitment you'll be signing up for rather than bemoan the many sacrifices later. I've come across far too many people who think that they should somehow just be able to jump onto the

professional speaking circuit as though they were getting in line to catch a bus.

If you're all-in despite what I've just described then make a full-throttle commitment to learn everything you can about your craft and to stay the course for the long-term. That's the irony of speaking professionally, while you're on stage for just 30-60 minutes, there's an enormous amount of effort that goes into building your brand and track record, and that takes years.

The good news—no, the great news—is that if you invest the time and this gig the personal and professional payback is enormous. There's no greater joy than being able to do something you truly love to do, to share that love with others, and to continue learning and growing through it.

Never stop being grateful for that.

This article originally appeared on Innovation Excellence: [www.innovationexcellence.com/blog/2019/11/14/if-you-want-to-get-paid-to-speak-heres-how](http://www.innovationexcellence.com/blog/2019/11/14/if-you-want-to-get-paid-to-speak-heres-how)

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Tom Koulopoulos is the author of 11 books and founder of the **Delphi Group**, a 25-year-old Boston-based think tank and a past Inc. 500 company that focuses on innovation and the future of business.

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Ron Kaufman

# How to attract and recruit the right service talent

There is a time-tested maxim: what you think about expands in life, and what you focus on becomes clearer. What you see and say repeatedly will shape the way you live today and who you will become tomorrow.

You can apply this principle when recruiting new team members by following these four steps to hire the right talent for your service culture. Start by making it easy for candidates to consistently see, hear, and understand what your organization thinks about service.

Those who align with your vision and values will be drawn closer and want to learn more about your spirit and purpose. Those who think, feel, or believe differently won't be attracted, and will naturally select themselves out. Both are positive outcomes for your culture and your future.

## 1. Share Your Engaging Service Vision

Use every opportunity to explain your Engaging Service Vision to prospective candidates. Place an uplifting message about your company culture on the website, in your employment ads, and in all the literature. Stress the importance of your service vision with your staff when you ask them to make new employee referrals and recommendations.

When job seekers apply, ask them to share in their own words what your service vision means to them. You can quickly check if candidates are aligned with your service vision by asking good

questions and listening carefully to their answers.

For example, if your vision includes being proactive in adding value, you might ask, "What do you consider great service when helping new customers?" If an applicant says, "Giving them exactly what they ask for and doing it quickly," that's different from a candidate who says, "Giving new customers what they ask for, but also making recommendations to help them understand what might help them even more."

If your vision includes going the extra mile, you might ask, "Tell me about a time you were most proud of your service achievement." If an applicant proudly explains how he or she delivered a project on time and on budget, that's different from someone who tells you about things he or she did for someone else that were never planned for in the first place.

If your vision involves working closely as a collaborating team, you could ask, "Tell me how you achieved one of your greatest service successes." If the candidate responds with lots of "I," "my," and "me," that's different from someone who tells you about "us," "our," and "we."

## 2. Involve Your Culture Leaders

As the service culture in your organization grows stronger, some of your team members will become culture leaders. These people are like tuning forks—vibrating strongly, keeping everyone else in key, and helping your symphony of employees, managers, and departments serve more smoothly and skilfully together. In a recruitment situation, these tuning forks can easily assess who will resonate

with the culture and should be hired, and who is far off key.

That's why Google requires so many on-campus, in-person interviews for candidates with its already "Googley" employees. Deeply loyal customers can become brand ambassadors and leaders of your culture, too. That's why Southwest Airlines involves its most loyal frequent flyers in final stages of new executive selection.

This makes a powerful statement to both sides. To loyal customers it says that Southwest Airlines will only hire people who are absolutely dedicated to serving and delighting the customer. And to new employees this sends an even more unmistakable message: that they must be genuinely dedicated to uplifting customer service. After all, who made the final recommendation to hire you?

### 3. Ask Your Candidates to Get to Know Your Service

For real insight into your applicants' service mindset and understanding, ask them to experience your service, evaluate your competitor's service, and then make suggestions to improve your current service. If they can't see anything you might do better, you might be happy with their performance for a while. But if your candidate comes back with constructive ideas, or suggestions for a new best practice, you will be more successful—and for much longer—when that person joins your team.

### 4. Involve All of Your Staff as Recruiters

Your people already know and understand your service culture. Ask them to make recommendations of people they know, or who they have worked with in the past, who would be great additions to the team.

That's why Starbucks gets and keeps so many successful new employees—because their current baristas are deeply involved in the local recruiting, screening, and selection process. Your best customers already know and appreciate your service. You can ask them for new hire

recommendations, too.

### Questions for Service Providers

- What are you doing to attract the best people to join your organization?
- How can you more actively participate in your organization's Service Recruitment process?

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### About the Author

Ron Kaufman is author of The New York Times, USA Today and Amazon.com bestseller, "Uplifting Service! A Proven Path to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues and Everyone Else You Meet" and 14 other books on service, business and inspiration. He is also the founder of UP! Your Service, a company that enables organizations to build Uplifting Service cultures and enjoy a sustainable advantage.

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“

*Curiosity is the engine of achievement.*

*If you're not prepared to be wrong, you'll never come up with anything original.*

*The fact is that, given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed — it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions.*

*Creativity is as important as literacy.*

*Human resources are like natural resources; they're often buried deep.*

”



**Sir Ken Robinson, British author, speaker and international advisor on education in the arts to government, non-profits, education and arts bodies.**

See him on TED at  
[https://www.ted.com/playlists/124/ken\\_robinson\\_10\\_talks\\_on\\_educ](https://www.ted.com/playlists/124/ken_robinson_10_talks_on_educ)





Michael Graber

## Creative clarity: Finding focus in the midst of ambiguity

I had the opportunity recently to hear Jon Kolko, Partner, Modernist Studio give a Keynote at the Back End of Innovation (BEI) conference on Creative Clarity: *Finding Focus in the Midst of Ambiguity*.

Jon started out by discussing the myth of creativity and how it becomes mystified in the workplace. “Nothing is further than the truth,” he adds.

Jon then offered four themes for embracing creativity in the workplace:

- Acknowledge feelings
- Tame ambiguity
- Let them run amok
- Creative vision

Many people that “everyone is naturally creative,” according to a TED talk. Jon is not sure if that is true and questions that orthodoxy.

“Things are hard to make, even if you do it automatically,” he says. Young designers see that others are making things all the time, but then they start comparing them, and then they give you on the project, maybe even give up on the industry. Or worse, they entrench and double down on the thing, argue for it. At the critique, the artist takes feedback too personally.

So, the first non-secret shared is to host critiques. These sessions fuel clarity and further iterations. We call it a Critique. We have rules.

The artist cannot explain him or herself. This structure builds trust as well as a sense of craftsmanship. This is how we handle feelings. Ambiguity is “scary at the beginning of a project,” Jon says.

“The ambiguity of a creativity problem is magical and it is overwhelming.” Once you feel your way through the questions and make something, you create something that can get feedback. The secret here is just get started, make something to start the process. Produce “crap” as a first draft, and the team will provide fuel to make it better.

Then constraints come in. One key, according to Charles Eames, is to “recognize as many creative restraints as possible.”

Through this process, you articulate, “this is the problem we are trying to solve.” You can help your team see and articulate the constraints.

Let your team run amok. This advice is important and subtle. On the continuum of constraints-iteration-creativity is a framework that relies on behaviours but abhors rules. The creative exploration needs no rules and a freedom to experiment.

What if you took away all rules at your workplace? You, as the leader, needs to own the consequences.

Drive a Vision.

Many clients say to Jon, “I’m not Steve Jobs. I don’t have a vision.” He claims that without a Vision, creativity cannot proposer.

A Vision gives “your teams a reason to go to work,” he adds.

“Constantly use real data to reinforce why their work matters ... and it needs to happen over and over and over,” he says.

“When articulating a vision, frame the strategy, not the solution.” Create narratives that support this strategic vision. These “concrete moments” help it translate to the value that could be created. This visualization shows here an organization is going. It is sufficiently visualized.

Create frame just enough to set a trajectory. Tell the story.

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### About the Author

Michael is Co-Founder and Managing Partner at Southern Growth Studio. Michael leads the qualitative team with a particular focus on innovation, to deliver high-impact go-to-market strategies and product launches. Michael has more than twenty years of experience leading marketing and innovation efforts. A published poet and musician, Michael is the creative force that compliments the analytical side of the house. Michael speaks and publishes frequently on best practices in marketing, business strategy, and innovation.

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Mike Shipulski

# Drive out fear for innovation to flow

The primary impediment to innovation is fear, and the prime directive of any innovation system should be to drive out fear.

A culture of accountability, implemented poorly, can inject fear and deter innovation. When the team is accountable to deliver on a project but are constrained to a fixed scope, a fixed launch date and resources, they will be afraid.

Because they know that innovation requires new work and new work is inherently unpredictable, they rightly recognize the triple accountability – time, scope and resources – cannot be met. From the very first day of the project, they know they cannot be successful and are afraid of the consequences.

A culture of accountability can be adapted to innovation to reduce fear. Here's one way. Keep the team small and keep them dedicated to a single innovation project. No resource sharing, no swapping and no double counting.

Create tight time blocks with clear work objectives, where the team reports back on a fixed pitch (weekly, monthly). But make it clear that they can flex on scope and level of completeness. They should try to do all the work within the time constraints but they must know that it's expected the scope will narrow or shift and the level of completeness will be governed by the time constraint.

Tell them you believe in them and you trust them to do their best, then praise their good judgement at the review meeting at the end of the time block.

Innovation is about solving new problems yet fear blocks teams from trying new things. Teams like to solve problems that are familiar because they have seen previous teams judged negatively for missing deadlines.

Here's the logic – we'd rather add too little novelty than be late. The team would love to solve new problems but their afraid, based on past projects, that they'll be chastised for missing a completion date that's disrespectful of the work content and level of novelty.

If you want the team to solve new problems, give them the tools, time, training and a teacher so they can select different problems and solve them differently. Simply put – create the causes and conditions for fear to quietly slink away so innovation will flow.

Fear is the most powerful inhibitor. But before we can lessen the team's fear we've got to recognize the causes and conditions that create it. Fear's job is to keep us safe, to keep us away from situations that have been risky or dangerous. To do this, our bodies create deep memories of those dangerous or scary situations and creates fear when it recognizes similarities between the current situation and past dangerous situations. In that way, less fear is created if the current situation feels differently from situations of the past where people were judged negatively.

To understand the causes and conditions that create fear, look back at previous projects. Make a list of the projects where project members were judged negatively for things outside their control such as: arbitrary launch dates not bound by the work content, high risk levels driven by unjustifiable specifications, insufficient resources, inadequate tools, poor training and no teacher. And make a list of projects where team

members were praised. For the projects that praised, write down attributes of those projects (e.g., high reuse, low technical risk) and their outcomes (e.g., on time, on cost). To reduce fear, the project team will bend new projects toward those attributes and outcomes. Do the same for projects that judged negatively for things outside the project teams' control. To reduce fear, the future project teams will bend away from those attributes and outcomes.

Now the difficult parts. As a leader, it's time to look inside. Make a list of your behaviours that set (or contributed to) causes and conditions that made it easy for the project team to be judged negatively for the wrong reasons. And then make a list of your new behaviours that will create future causes and conditions where people aren't afraid to solve new problems in new ways.

This article originally appeared on: [www.innovationexcellence.com/blog/2019/11/11/drive-out-fear-for-innovation-to-flow/](http://www.innovationexcellence.com/blog/2019/11/11/drive-out-fear-for-innovation-to-flow/)

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## About the Author:

Mike strives to define best practices and tools for *Product and Technology Development* and embed them into company culture. With that, practices and tools become a working part of how a company does business instead of ending up in a thick handbook that defines how things "should be done" which is read by no one. To Mike, behaviour is most important.

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Adam Malofsky

# The secrets to effective, efficient ideation



We all want to win the never-ending race for great, effective, profitable new ideas. We want these ideas without a huge effort, without a huge risk and without a huge investment. We also want ideas with impact, that are rapidly actionable and ideally that utilize mostly existing resources and relationships.

Most ideation is done in a highly periodic, no idea is bad, let's go for quantity over quality kind of way. Usually an important, expensive consultant gets involved. The often given guidance for these all-day or multi-day activities that involve too many people for too long, but insure a long, expensive consulting engagement:

- Conduct periodic, major events
- Involve a large group of internal people
- Reserve judging ideas
- Go for as many ideas as possible
- Employ a professional facilitator
- Use a highly structured process or procedure
- Conclude by filtering, ranking & documenting the ideas

I don't know about you, but I don't think I have ever met a great inventor, scientist or businessperson who said "four times a year I'm going to brainstorm, maybe even just once or twice and do all of the above". Even better are those "innovate 10% of the time proclamations". Does that mean that you are not innovative the rest of the time? The Apollo 13 crisis staff at NASA certainly did not do things that way. Neither did the Wright brothers, Steve Jobs or Thomas Edison.

So, then, what are the real secrets? Let's try this guidance,

building upon the great business people and inventors of the last few hundred years:

- Start not with ideas but with debating, noting global trends, needs, abstracted ideas
- Brainstorm constantly, as time allows, alone and in small groups - every day
- Involve diverse people, by experience, function and market
- The above, now including customers, their customers - the whole ecosystem
- Make absolutely sure you include the frontline - sales, tech service, biz dev, etc...
- Iterate a lot, identify what's valuable - kill bad ideas quickly
- Go for relevant ideas that serve major trends in context to other options
- Develop varied internal champions to serve as facilitators
- Use a con-texted approach, using tools sets that work for your unique group
- Regularly, periodically filter and re-rank documented ideas - it's never over

Real ideation effectiveness means ideation whenever you can alone and in small groups, especially as the epiphany, the moment hits you, your group. Even if you are forced into the big program, why not be examining trends, needs, abstractions and then developing ideas all of the time. Ideation, realize, is not scheduled!

I also often involved contrarians who I knew would not easily be agreeable and or those who I knew had little knowledge about, say, the technology and so they would ask a lot of great, but simple, questions others would be coy about asking. Go for a vigorous,

live, aggressive debate. Small groups then can consistently develop more detailed, conceptual ideas and the associated pitch, storylines and min-business plans any start-up or corporate initiative should have.

These small group sessions often occurred around the water cooler, in an empty conference room, in someone's office or at a restaurant over lunch. Many occurred and were initiated by sales and marketing after an extended trip or a unique customer visit. The point here - waiting for these highly structured, facilitated, often off site, periodic and infrequent brain storming sessions can by their nature be missing dozens of ideas before they ever got off the ground.

Great ideas come from a holistic, contexted world view. To this end, I've often involved highly varied co-workers, but not just friends, in my own groups. I always involve my customers and suppliers on understanding trends, needs and wants that often are indeed ideas. Your sales staff are the ever present customer contacts as are customer service and technical support. The big ideas often come from these constant exchanges. Build upon this and insure that these critical staffers have regular, encouraged contact with their in house, technical counterparts. Even better - require the internal technical, support, service and marketing staff to spend time with customers, on the road regularly throughout the year. Get creative here. Customers usually truly appreciate the intent and purpose and the involvement.

The best? Have an idea about something? See a challenge? Have the group, you, whoever do the actual job, use the actual products, experience the impact versus simply questioning, listening. Don't just observe it, do it! This truly blows out the thinking and productivity.

Yes, there are bad ideas. Lots and lots of bad ideas. How many of us have heard the utterly absurd and then had an equally uninformed facilitator tell us to just let it go, to get the ideas down. While filling time and pleasing the uniformed makes work and helps a consulting group fill the docket and justify a big bill, it does nothing for productivity. Time, people and money are scarce corporate resources to be carefully allocated and utilized. Silly, bad or unsubstantiated ideas serve to frustrate those who see it right away and are not allowed to challenge or ask obvious questions. Allowing a person or group to present those ideas without question in the moment and then carry forward with them can be professionally damaging.

Finally, they are just plain distracting and a waste of time.

Sometimes the bad may actually be good, but without any rules or thought, the idea never seems good to begin with even if it is.

So, what's the solution? Companies must constantly develop context via a clear corporate mission and the surrounding influencing trends, communicate them constantly to provide employees that context and then often create multidisciplinary groups where soft knowledge and communication hones everyone's understanding of the company and the context of their products and activities within the bounds of influencing trends. With this, bad ideas can be minimized.

To develop an idea, I think it's important to have a few criteria for presenting one:

- What challenge or opportunity does the idea serve?
- A one line bi-line or pitch for the idea – the billboard phrase.
- How can we make money?
- Why would we be better?
- How can we quantify its value relative to other solutions or the situation?

- Have a customer and a customer's customer around when you can for real feedback
- Experience the current solution and the new one, somehow - to truly understand

Such a simple approach forces the individual or small group to really look at ideas or concepts holistically and see where the fatal flaws may. The presentation also allows for developing deeper questions, modifying and improving the idea or by leaving an area blank, acknowledging to the group the hole and can someone please fill it in. This alternative approach delivers fewer but higher quality ideas to develop and then for rapid fire, continuous iterating and ranking to occur.

Now let's talk about facilitation. I have found that while occasionally needing a professional facilitator, it's often far better to train and develop staff for future business and management opportunities by allowing them to first self-organize ideation groups and present the results for either other to review or subsequent further development. For emerging managers, particularly multidisciplinary or operation management, the ability to brainstorm and lead solution definition, conception, selection, development and implementation is critical to their and the company's success. Utilizing outsiders may be great for training the aforementioned, but too often may add no real value long term to the organization and only exacerbates the punctuated innovation issue. Indeed, attend training or coaching separately is best. There are many courses and programs for teaching these tools, but the bottom line is that some people are innately better and may need little to no training at all beyond discipline and a profound respect for others. The message – go inside long term for better benefits to your organization.

Now then, let's talk about tools for ideation. The message here is that there should be no highly or overly structured process.

Each group, whether one person, a small group or a large one will have it's own likes and dislikes and so when one uses great internal or external facilitators, they are keen on understanding the people involved, their styles and backgrounds and the

corporate culture and thus what tools will work for that particular group, time and situation. A general approach, or simplified process, should then be equipped with those tools the facilitator or individual sees as germane. The point here – adapt to the situation, the group for maximum ideation effectiveness and results.

To close, utilizing a constant, ever evolving approach to internally led ideation can be far more effective and efficient for an organization. Communicating the results and constantly monitoring the quality, quantity, life cycle and end results provide metrics for better corporate management versus the punctuated, periodic end of the big session summaries where the in between is lost.

Indeed, constant innovation, ideation, analysis and experience activity leads to a living organizational learning experience with terrific results far more often, at far less risk and at a far lower cost.

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### About the Author

Adam Malofsky, PhD is the Managing Director of Elemence.

Adam's life focuses upon materials and manufacturing trends and opportunity identification, with subsequent evaluation, assessment and finally, where logical, venture creation through to commercialization. A 25-year veteran of the performance chemicals, polymers and materials industries, Dr. Adam Malofsky has held numerous leadership positions in a variety of start-up opportunities, both private and within corporate America.

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Greg Satell

# The Gladwell trap



I recently bought a book that I was really excited about. It's one of those books that's created a lot of buzz and it was highly recommended by someone I respect. The author's pedigree included Harvard, Stanford, McKinsey and a career as a successful entrepreneur and CEO.

Yet about halfway in I noticed that he was choosing facts to fit his story and ignoring critical truths that would indicate otherwise, much like Malcolm Gladwell's often does in his books. Once I noticed a few of these glaring oversights I found myself not being able to fully trust anything the author wrote and set the book aside.

Stories are important and facts matter. When we begin to believe in false stories, we begin to make decisions based on them. When these decisions go awry, we're likely to blame other factors, such as ourselves, those around us or other elements of context and not the false story. That's how many businesses fail. They make decisions based on the wrong stories.

### **Don't Believe Everything You Think**

Go to just about any innovation conference and you will find some pundit on stage telling a story about a famous failure, usually

Blockbuster, Kodak or Xerox. In each case, the reason given for the failure is colossal incompetence by senior management: Blockbuster didn't recognize the Netflix threat. Kodak invented, but then failed to market, a digital camera. Xerox PARC developed technology, but not products.

In each case, the main assertion is demonstrably untrue. Blockbuster did develop and successfully execute a digital strategy, but its CEO left the company due a dispute and the strategy was reversed. Kodak's EasyShare line of digital cameras were top sellers, but couldn't replace the massive profits the company made developing film. The development of the laser printer at Xerox PARC actually saved the company.

None of this is very hard to uncover. Still, the author fell for two of these bogus myths (Kodak and Xerox), even after obviously doing significant research for the book. Most probably, he just saw something that fit with his narrative and never bothered to question whether it was true or not, because he was too busy validating what he *already knew to be true*.

This type of behaviour is so common that there is a name for it: confirmation bias. We naturally seek out information that confirms our existing beliefs. It takes

significant effort to challenge our own assumptions, so we rarely do. To overcome that is hard enough. Yet that's only part of the problem.

### **Majorities Don't Just Rule, They Also Influence**

In the 1950's, Solomon Asch undertook a pathbreaking series of conformity studies. What he found was that in small groups, people will conform to a majority opinion. The idea that people have a tendency toward conformity is nothing new, but that they would give obviously wrong answers to simple and unambiguous questions was indeed shocking.

Now think about how hard it is for a more complex idea to take hold across a broad spectrum of people, each with their own biases and opinions. The truth is that majorities don't just rule, they also influence. More recent research suggests that the effect applies not only to people we know well, but that we are also influenced even by second and third degree relationships.

We tend to accept the beliefs of people around us as normal. So, if everybody believes that the leaders of Blockbuster, Kodak and Xerox were simply dullards who were oblivious to what was going on around them, then we are very likely to accept that as the truth. Combine this group effect with

confirmation bias, it becomes very hard to see things differently. That's why it's important to step back and ask hard questions. Why did these companies fail? Did foolish and lazy people somehow rise to the top of successful organizations, or did smart people make bad decisions? Was there something else to the story? Given the same set of facts, would we act any differently?

### The Inevitable Paradigm Shift

The use of the term "paradigm shift" has become so common that most people are unaware that it started out having a very specific meaning. The idea of a paradigm shift was first established by Thomas Kuhn in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, to describe how scientific breakthroughs come to the fore.

It starts with an established model, the kind we learn in school or during initial training for a career. Models become established because they are effective and the more proficient we become at applying a good model, the better we perform. The leaders in any given field owe much of their success to these models.

Yet no model is perfect and eventually anomalies show up. Initially, these are regarded as "special cases" and are worked around. However, as the number of special cases proliferate, the model becomes increasingly untenable and a crisis ensues. At this point, a fundamental change in assumptions has to take place if things are to move forward.

The problem is that most people who are established in the field believe in the traditional model, because that's what most people around them believe. So, they seek out facts to confirm these beliefs. Few are willing to challenge what "everybody knows" and those who do are often put at great professional and reputational risk.

### Why We Fail To Adapt

Now we can begin to see why not only businesses, but whole industries get disrupted. We tend to defend, rather than question, our existing beliefs and those around us often reinforce them. To make matters worse, by this time the idea has become so well established that we will often incur switching costs if we abandon it. That's why we fail to adapt.

Yet not everybody shares our experiences. Others, who have not grown up with the conventional wisdom, often do not have the same assumptions. They also don't have an existing peer group that will enforce those assumptions. So, for them, the flaws are much easier to see, as are the opportunities to doing things another way.

Of course, none of this has to happen. As I describe in *Mapping Innovation*, some companies, such as IBM and Procter & Gamble, have survived for over a century because they are always actively looking for new problems to solve, which forces them to look for new ideas and insights. It compels them to question what they think they know.

Getting stories right is hard work. You *have to force yourself*. However, we all have an obligation to get it right. For me, that means relentlessly checking every fact with experts, even for things that I know most people won't notice. Inevitably, I get things wrong—sometimes terribly wrong—and need to be corrected. That's always humbling.

I do it because I know stories are powerful. They take on a life of their own. Getting them right takes effort. As my friend Whitney Johnson points out, the best way to avoid disruption is to first disrupt yourself.

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### About the Author

Greg Satell is an international keynote speaker, adviser and bestselling author of *Cascades: How to Create a Movement that Drives Transformational Change*. His previous effort, *Mapping Innovation*, was selected as one of the best business books of 2017.

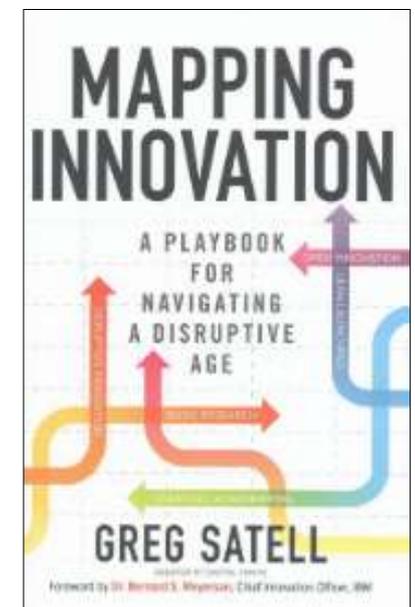
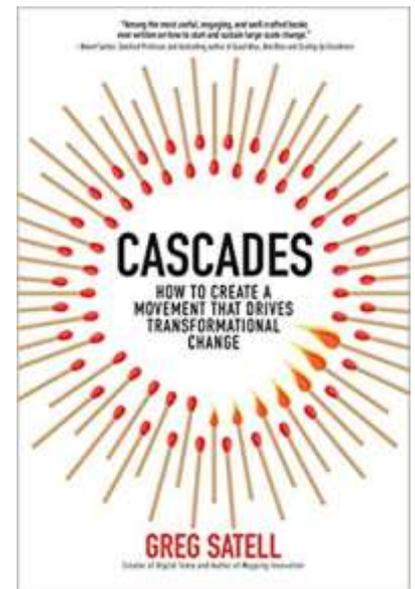
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Petra Urhofer

# Looking after your mental health when you work for yourself

Thursday 10<sup>th</sup> October 2019 was World Mental Health Awareness Day, aiming to educate and raise awareness of mental health issues.

Research suggests that becoming self-employed leads to greater job satisfaction and, therefore, can lead to better mental health. However, those of us who work from home often face feelings of isolation and loneliness, which can also negatively impact our mental health. The existing stigma surrounding mental health also leads to many suffering in silence, not wanting to talk about any potential struggles.

Whilst working for yourself brings endless positives, it also requires self-discipline and self-motivation to face day to day successes and challenges. As always, there is no one-fits-all solution, but little changes to work routines can positively impact how we feel about ourselves and our work:

## 1. Be aware

Pay attention to your feelings and be aware of how certain situations stress you out so that you can effectively tackle or eliminate them. Mental health issues are often a result of long-term ignorance of existing problems and can be managed by being aware of what is going on in our heads. Talk openly about your feelings – positive and negative. Sometimes only articulating our problems gives us a better understanding and getting things off our chests can be very refreshing.

## 2. Surround yourself with the right people

People in our lives have a great impact – they can be a great source of motivation and energy, and similarly, they can have a very

negative impact. Miserable people will only make you feel more miserable, so try to spend as much time as you can with positive-minded people who are inspirational and make you feel good.

Don't underestimate the importance of relationships and regular communication – it makes a big difference. It's also critical to learn to trust people and delegate tasks that you can't or don't have the time to do so that you can focus on what matters.

## 3. Learn to relax

Working for yourself makes it extremely difficult to switch off and relax, especially if you are working from home. We are all guilty of checking our emails and social media in the evenings, but is it really necessary? You will always have more work to do but try stepping away from work in the evenings and weekends and watch what happens – there will be no disasters!

The work will still be there the next day and by giving yourself a break and spending your time in a way that will allow you to turn off your brain will leave you refreshed and motivated when you are back at it. What really helps is controlling your thinking so you are focused on activities that you will do to relax, instead of going through long to-do-lists and analyzing past work events in your head.

## 4. Make physical exercise part of your routine

It doesn't have to be anything extreme – just a few hours per week will make a difference. Physical exercise is designed to boost your endorphin levels and not only help you relax but make



you look and feel good. I find that the only place where my mind stops thinking is when I'm at the gym.

## 5. Take breaks

To avoid being overworked and unproductive, set your daily working hours and do your best to stick to them. By working ridiculous hours each day, you are more likely to become less effective and more tired. Try to have at least a few breaks during the day and make sure you take time for lunch, preferably not at your desk. Switch off from work-related activities by doing something completely different. Meet people, go to the gym or just leave your working space. It's very refreshing and good for the brain and soul.

## 6. Learn to say NO

Think about whether you need to say yes to all of the things you are doing. It's likely that you are overcommitting and you might have different reasons for it – not wanting to disappoint, feeling that you have no choice, or having an unrealistic idea of what is involved – just to name a few. But being overcommitted can quickly lead to burnout and exhaustion.

Saying No in an appropriate way does not communicate that you are unwilling, rather, it communicates that you are taking your commitments seriously. Avoid the automatic yes and be sure you have a realistic and detailed idea of what's required before committing to anything.

### 7. Focus on your long-term goals

There will always be more work that you can do. What makes a difference is to differentiate between the work that will get you to your long-term goals and work that is just taking up a lot of your time without any real results. It's obvious that we should focus on work that matters but it's very easy to be distracted by other factors and little bits of work during that day.

To focus on what's important, write down your long-term objectives and what needs to be done in order to achieve them. And then regularly remind yourself and check progress.

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Petra is Founder of Squirrels&Bears a marketing consultancy helping small businesses to look and grow bigger.

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Andy Bounds

# Top Dog: impress and influence everyone you meet

Think and talk like a Top Dog



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### About the Author

Andy Bounds is an expert at helping companies communicate and sell better. Author of two best-selling books and winner of the title Britain's Sales Trainer of the Year, Andy has shared his expertise with some of the world's largest companies, helping every one of them have more success. Marketing legend Drayton Bird said Andy had taught him '... more about effective communicating than a lady who'd taught two American Presidents'.

Are you following me on twitter?

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When you speak to important people ("Top Dogs"), how you feel inside impacts how impressive you are on your outside.

For example, if you think they're more important than you, you'll be too deferential. You'll say things like "Thanks for sparing the time to see me. I won't take much of your time."

Or if you think you're better at something than them, you may act like a persecutor ("You shouldn't be doing it like that") or a rescuer ("Let me save you").

Of course, if you think neither of you is very good... that's when you become a Dementor and suck the energy out of the room – "We're all screwed."

But the Top Dog mentality is where you think you're useful to each other. That you both have something to contribute. That you're peers.

And, when you see yourself like this, you naturally begin to say the right things. So less "Thanks for your time" and more "I've been looking forward to our meeting – how are you?"

Top Dogs don't want you to be deferential. They want you to be valuable.

How do you see yourself?

### Action Point

With important people, identify which section you're in. And if you aren't Top Dog enough, identify how you can change what you say, so you instantly impress them.

Sue Barrett

# Want a viable future? Opportunities abound in the Common Good



What type of board member, CEO or sales leader are you? Are you stuck in the day-to-day looking to meet your monthly and quarterly targets, looking to maximise profit, shareholder return and your bonuses? OR Are you looking into the future to see what lies ahead ensuring there is a viable sustainable path for all to follow and participate in?

In today's world everything is up for grabs.

Old institutions are crashing and dying because they held onto the past and failed to adapt.

Take Thomas Cook Travel as a current case in point. While their leaders were bathing themselves in 29M pounds of bonuses, their 'ship' was sinking faster than the Titanic. They had plenty of opportunity to adapt and change but didn't even think it worth trying. Now thousands of people are out of work and the British Government has refused to bail out this 178 year old business, and rightly so. It's unbelievable that their board and C-suites allowed this to happen.

And they are not alone. There are other businesses that are failing to adapt to the future and, by the looks of it, are looking to take us

all down with them as they cling to their dying assets and old ways of doing business. Not interested in the common good or caring at all about the climate crisis and rising inequality, they cling to their bonus regimes looking to eke out every dollar they can to maximise profits and shareholder return and halt progress.

Those of you who have been following me for many years, know that I stand for a fair exchange of value, working for the common good, a 'we' focused approach to business and community, and ethical, human-centred sales practices, systems and strategies.

And you can dismiss my views as my own idealised outlook of the world, but when Harvard starts to write about the failings of short-term profit maximisation and shareholder return then I reckon more people will start to pay attention to what we need to do to create viable future where everyone can flourish.

And it's not just Harvard and other noted sources that are calling out old outdated business paradigms, it's people on the ground around the world calling for better ways of living and doing business. I was extremely heartened as a person, parent and business leader by the recent

Climate Strike action. My team and family participated in the Climate Strike event in Melbourne with 150,000 people as well as joining in solidarity with **over 3,000 Australian and New Zealand businesses** who signed up to #notbusinessasusual.

We have everything we need to create the viable future we want and desperately need.

Opportunities abound in the common good, just look at the **abundance of possibilities** that stem from producing **clean energy**, **hemp**, **recycling**, and the **circular economy**.

**Hemp** alone can be used as a viable alternative to plastic, in building products –**hempcrete**-, **fibres**, medicines, paper and much more. It's high in protein and as such a popular food with vegans. The list goes on.

There are so many opportunities if only businesses and governments would be prepared to invest in new and better value chains and infrastructure that create new and more sustainable jobs and industries.

The hemp example is one that could be easily developed and overtake old, outdated, ways of operating so we can deliver the products and services we need in

a sustainable manner that doesn't kill our world.

We need to find common ground for the common good that can be readily transformed into viable businesses.

Despite the obvious resistance from some quarters, I remain optimistic that people power, human ingenuity, our pro-social orientation and our innate desire for fairness will overcome these major challenges and set us on a better course for a better, fairer and more sustainable world.

Remember **everybody lives by selling something.**

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### About the Author

Sue is Founder & Managing Director of Barrett Consulting Group (est. 1995), incorporating Barrett, Sales Essentials, Mind Your Emotions, Sustainable Selling, Barrett Research, and Sell Like a Woman. Barrett is one of Australia's leading sales consulting firms specialising in Sales Strategy, Sales Force Design, Assessments, Sales Training and Sales Coaching.

Sue is regarded by many mainstream business press publishers & editors as one of the most authoritative thought leaders reporting and commenting on the selling profession and sales operations in Australia today, with her company's articles featuring weekly in BRW & Smart Company, as well as bimonthly in IPA's magazine The Public Accountant.

Sue has written and published 21 books and 500+ articles to date on the world of 21st Century selling including topics on sales philosophy/culture/ethics, sales leadership, sales coaching, sales training, selling skills, sales mind set and resilience, neuroscience in selling, etc. Sue works as business adviser, sales coach & trainer, speaker, and facilitator.

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Martin Pollins

# It's much better to be different than it is to be better

This is a rallying cry to accountants and lawyers everywhere – you are in danger of being caught in the headlights and blinded. As business professionals, we think we have a pretty good idea of what it takes to run a successful professional practice. Attention to detail and a close eye on billing recovery rates are the benchmarks in an industry that is sadly still clutching onto the past.

Well, the bad news is that the future is here and it's here now. What do we really provide to our clients? An important service, certainly, but for the most part, clients only employ us because they have to. This is not a recipe for growth or optimal earnings. We mustn't kid ourselves that our firm has qualities that surpass anything our competitors can offer.

If you don't believe this... Imagine for a moment a prospective client asking what makes your firm stand out from the rest. Certainly, we'd respond by saying that our fees are reasonable, that we are very approachable and knowledgeable etc. But the truth is, that if the prospect were to go to our competitor next door and ask the same question, they would get pretty much the same answer.

### What does it mean?

What this means is that we don't have an advantage at all. We are probably no better than most other firms that the prospective client meets. To stand out from the crowd, a professional firm today has to offer greater value than its competitors. Clients look to us to solve their problems; we are in the problem solving business, so we need to offer help and advice as well as a precise compliance service.

The nature of that advice should be wide-ranging:

- Are our clients working as efficiently as they could be?
- Do they have appropriate systems and processes in place?

- Do they require additional services to make their working lives easier?

### How do we do that?

By regularly reaching out to our clients with newsletters, factsheets, informative events or even the occasional lunch, we can provide the added value that will retain and grow existing clients and make us attractive to new ones.

The brilliance of the internet (and all-too often, the downfall of many firm), is that comparison between your competitors and your firm is easy and client mobility is rapid.

A strong web portfolio of resources such as blog-posts, fact-sheets, calculators and industry news helps to set one practice apart from another. Clients don't care about hourly rates or the processes we go through behind the scenes.

Ultimately, clients want to engage someone who is familiar with their business sector, who understands the pressures and opportunities that they face and who can be a trusted, caring adviser and friend. At the end of the day, clients rarely complain about poor service, they vote with their feet. You want them to walk towards you rather than away.

Developing and maintaining new resources is no easy task, which is why **OneSmartPlace** has developed a suite of tools that firm can access and brand for a low monthly payment. You can start moving from the ordinary to the extraordinary by visiting [onesmartplace.com/resources](http://onesmartplace.com/resources).

Remember these words from the wise Australian, Barry Urquhart: "It's much better to be different than it is to be better"



Tamara Ghandour

# Burst of Innovation - how to get and measure strategic thinking



As leaders, we know that it is critical to today's changing times to think differently about what's in front of us. We need to get out of "business as usual" and break through the status quo mindset to push our teams to get more innovation, growth, and new opportunities. That's where strategic thinking comes in.

The challenge with strategic thinking is we know we need it, but we don't quite know how to make it tangible and real for people. We want our team to be **better strategic thinkers, problem solvers, and critical thinkers**, but we don't know *how to help them do that*, nor *how to measure it*. As a result, we become frustrated when they don't meet our expectations.

## How do you get people to be better strategic thinkers?

Ultimately, strategic thinking is about thinking differently. It's about innovation as well as thoughtfulness. What we've discovered is, there are nine triggers that act as levers to unlock innovation in your mind, and everyone has a different combination of the top two power triggers that form your unique Everyday Innovator style. **Take the free assessment!**

When we and our team understand our Everyday Innovator style, we can tap into

each of our strengths in different areas - *how* we can be better strategic thinkers, better creative problem solvers, better adapters to change, and maybe even harnessers of change depends on how we innovate.

For example, Inquisitives are people who innovate in the questions, and not the answers. They are really good at challenging assumptions, pulling back the layers of the onion to dig deep and go under the surface to find meaningful innovation. So, if you've got an Inquisitive on your team, you can encourage them to ask more questions that challenge the underlying thinking and assumptions because that forces everyone to do things differently.

With Tweakers, whose strengths lie in editing, adjusting, and optimizing, you need a different approach. For them, asking them to be a better strategic thinker

could be asking them to take other people's work and to modify it to take it to the next level.

Personally, I'm a Risk-taker Experiential. Experimentals are all about innovating in motion, through doing, and by bringing ideas to life. We've got to get the ideas out of our heads instead of holding them back, because that squelches that innovation and strategic thinking. For us, more strategic thinking would be experimenting with ideas and playing with them because, in doing that, we're going to have more innovation and shifts in perspective.

These are just some examples of how we can make strategic thinking tangible and real for people. All we're doing is tapping into their natural innovation strengths but, by giving them **concrete guidance**, we are



making it something they can actually do.

### How do you measure strategic thinking?

Apart from simply measuring if an Inquisitive asks more questions, or if an Experiential tests out more ideas, there are other behaviours that reflect the strategic thinking that we want more of.

For example, being brutally honest when it's hard to do is an indicator of strategic thinking. Strategic thinking is sometimes about disagreeing with other people and not just taking things at face value. It's about being willing to challenge things, and not just doing them to get them done and check them off our list. So, someone on our team being brutally honest is a sign that they are pushing the envelope and thinking differently about the problem.

Submitting suggestions or ideas is another behaviour that shows strategic thinking. Particularly for Collaboratives who are all about getting information and pulling ideas together, the more ideas you submit the more innovative you can get.

These behaviours are indicators of strategic thinking, of being innovative, and of having a culture where everybody's bringing their best.

You, as a leader, need to be looking out for the team members displaying these behaviours, because that shows that the strategic wheels are turning. Rewarding people for behaviours like that means that you can also measure them at that level. And over time, you will start to see them more at an individual, team and organization level.

**Strategic thinking is crucial to driving innovation and growth**, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a struggle or cause for frustration. It starts with getting people to recognize the unique kind of innovators they are and tapping into their innate strengths - the actual tangible side of strategic thinking. The other part of it is looking for, measuring and

rewarding for these types of behaviours that you see that are a reflection and strong indicators of strategic thinking on your team.

With these in place, you'll have better strategic thinkers, problem solvers and critical thinkers on your team, putting out innovative ideas and capitalizing on new opportunities.

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### About the Author

Tamara Ghandour is the President of LaunchStreet and the creator of the Innovation Quotient Edge assessment, the only tool that helps people discover how they innovate best and add value. When leaders and teams dealing with massively changing marketplaces like healthcare, manufacturing, hospitality and education need to up their ability to innovate, they call LaunchStreet. Organizations like Disney, Red Robin, Hilton and Arrow Electronics look to LaunchStreet to help them make innovation everybody's business. Tamara's business innovation podcast, Inside LaunchStreet is continually rated as a top business podcast across the globe.

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“

*Don't compare yourself with anyone in this world...if you do so, you are insulting yourself.*

*I choose a lazy person to do a hard job. Because a lazy person will find an easy way to do it.*

*Success is a lousy teacher. It seduces smart people into thinking they can't lose.*

*If you are born poor it's not your mistake, but if you die poor it is your mistake.*

*Life is not fair - get used to it!*

*It's fine to celebrate success but it is more important to heed the lessons of failure.*

*We all need people who will give us feedback. That's how we improve.*

*I believe that if you show people the problems and you show them the solutions they will be moved to act.*

”



**William Henry Gates III - the American business magnate, software developer, investor, and philanthropist. He is best known as the co-founder of Microsoft Corporation.**





Bob Apollo

# Assumptions kill opportunities

I've had the opportunity to sit in on a number of QBRs with my clients, and as an outside observer I'm struck by how common it is for salespeople to make untested assumptions that directly affect the accuracy of their sales forecasts and the outcomes of their sales opportunities.

It's all-too-easy for salespeople - particularly if they have relentlessly positive personalities - to fall into the assumption trap, and to confuse hope with evidence. It's easy to project past experiences onto current situations, and to assume that they will lead to the same results.

And it's all too easy (to draw upon one of my recent articles) for salespeople to succumb to avoidable errors of ignorance or application. The conclusion is clear: assumptions kill opportunities. So how can sales leaders create an environment that avoids these mistakes?

Checklists can help. They can draw the salesperson's attention to the things that - if they spent a moment reflecting - they recognise that they need to know and do. Sharing the best practices and the winning habits of their top performing colleagues can also help.

### Fostering self-honesty and self-awareness

But the most important thing a sales leader can do is to establish an environment that fosters and rewards an openness to learning from others, curiosity, self-honesty, self-awareness and self-criticism.

I've come across some toxic sales environments that stress the

opposite - focusing on making the number to the exclusion of all other considerations, and which refuse to listen to or to acknowledge what they see as negative inputs that challenge the corporate narrative.

These cultures are ineffective and unsustainable. Fortunately, I've always been able to qualify them out as potential clients or to terminate the relationship if one has managed to slip through the net (I can only think of one such organisation in the past decade).

### Assumptions must be challenged

Assumptions need to be challenged. They need to be called out for what they are. And this needs to be done in a way that encourages people to acknowledge and confront their own untested assumptions rather than suppressing them.

The process of qualification is acknowledged by most observers to be the critical foundation of success in complex sales, and in too many sales organisations it is managed as a somewhat cursory exercise that frequently conceals unchallenged assumptions.

### Where's the evidence?

Sales managers have a critical role to play in flushing out untested assumptions. They need to not only ask their salespeople where every opportunity stands against a set of consistently defined qualification factors, they must also expect salespeople to be able to justify their judgements and support them with tangible evidence rather than guesswork.

If the salesperson is unable to do this, they should be coached (in fact, you want them to decide to

do so of their own volition) to recheck their assumptions and - where necessary - to honestly admit that they "don't know" and take action to find out the truth.

In some circumstances, a more extreme approach may be required - one in which poorly qualified opportunities are removed from the active pipeline until and unless the salesperson can make a compelling, evidence-backed case for why they should continue to invest in them.

### Facing the end of year with confidence rather than hope

I'm prepared to bet that there are assumptions lurking under the surface in a number of the sales opportunities that some of your salespeople are relying on to make their targets for the year (and maybe yours as well).

They (and you) can carry on, hoping for the best. Or by robustly requalifying these opportunities and by uncovering and confronting any unjustified assumptions, you may still have time to do something about what you find.

Another effective approach can be to hold "what could go wrong" pre-mortems and evaluate potential errors of ignorance and application in your most important currently forecasted end-of-year sales opportunities while you can still take corrective action.

### Redirecting your energies

And as for the opportunities that you come to realise are never likely to close before the end of the year, you and your sales team can redirect your energies towards the well-qualified and eminently closable opportunities

that could benefit from more resource.

Or would you prefer to wait until the end of the year before your salesperson admits (to misquote Bob Seeger) "I wish I knew then what I know now"? If you're determined to maximise your success for the remainder of the year, make sure that your team understands, believes and does something about the fact that assumptions kill opportunities.

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### About the Author

Bob Apollo is the founder and Chief Strategist of Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners Ltd, a pioneering B2B sales and marketing performance improvement consultancy, based in Reading, UK. Inflexion-Point is one of the UK's leading B2B Sales and Marketing Performance Improvement specialists. Their research-led, evidence-based approach enables clients to increase pipeline values, shorten average sales cycles and improve average sales win rates.

Bob now works with growth-minded organisations of all sizes to help them build scalable businesses. He has written hundreds of articles on the subject of sales and marketing performance, spoken at dozens of industry conferences and events, and blogs regularly for a range of thought-leading sites including Entrepreneur Country, My Venture Pad, The Customer Collective and CustomerThink.

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# World Business

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Mike Shipulski

# Three rules for better decision making



The primary responsibility of management is to allocate resources in the way that best achieves business objectives. If there are three or four options to allocate resources, which is the best choice? What is the time horizon for the decision? Is it best to hire more people? Why not partner with a contract resource company? Build a new facility or add to the existing one? No right answers, but all require a decision.

## Rule 1 – Make decisions overtly.

All too often, decisions happen slowly over time without knowledge the decision was actually made. A year down the road, we wake up from our daze and realize we're all aligned with a decision we didn't know we made. That's bad for business. Make them overtly and document them.

## Rule 2 – Define the decision criteria before it's time to decide.

We all have biases and left to our own, we'll make the decision that fits with our biases. For example, if we think the project is a good idea, we'll interpret the project's achievements through our biased lenses and fund the next phase. To battle this, define the decision criteria months before the funding decision will be made. Think if-then. If the project demonstrates A, then we'll allocate \$50,000 for the next phase; if the project demonstrates A, B and C, then we'll allocate \$100,000; if the project fails to demonstrate A, B or C, then we'll scrap the project and start a new one. If the

decision criteria aren't predefined, you'll define them on-the-spot to justify the decision you already wanted to make.

## Rule 3 – Define who will decide before it's time to decide.

Will the decision be made by anonymous vote or by a show of hands? Is a simple majority sufficient, or does it require a two-thirds majority? Does it require a consensus? If so, does it have to be unanimous or can there be some disagreement? If there can be disagreement, how many people can disagree? Does the loudest voice decide? Or does the most senior person declare their position and everyone else falls in line like sheep?

Think back to the last time your company made a big decision. Were the decision criteria defined beforehand? Can you go back to the meeting minutes and find how the project performed against the decision criteria? Were the if-then rules defined upfront? If so, did you follow them? And now that you remember how it went last time, do you think you would have made a better decision if the decision criteria and if-thens were in place before the decision? Now, decide how it will go next time.

And for that last big decision, is there a record of how the decision was made? If there was a vote, who voted up and who voted down? If a consensus was reached, who overtly said they agreed to the decision and who dissented? Or did the most senior person declare a consensus when

in fact it was a consensus of one? If you can find a record of the decision, what does the record show? And if you can't find the record, how do you feel about that? Now that you reflected on last time, decide how it will go next time.

It's scary to think about how we make decisions. But it's scarier to decide we will make them the same way going forward. It's time to decide we will put more rigor into our decision making.

This article originally appeared on: <https://www.innovationexcellence.com/blog/2019/10/27/three-rules-for-better-decision-making>

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## About the Author:

Mike strives to define best practices and tools for *Product and Technology Development* and embed them into company culture. With that, practices and tools become a working part of how a company does business instead of ending up in a thick handbook that defines how things "should be done" which is read by no one. To Mike, behavior is most important.

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Soren Kaplan

# Run wildly effective meetings with this one powerful template

Getting the most out of meetings is easy if you know how to effectively design them.

One of the biggest black holes in workplace productivity is the poorly designed, poorly run meeting. No wonder 71 percent of senior managers view their companies' meetings as unproductive and inefficient.

When meetings aren't effective, the natural instinct is to schedule yet another meeting to make up for it. The result is meeting proliferation that zaps workplace energy and precious time and can negatively impact your corporate culture. How many times have you heard someone say they like to work nights and weekends because they can actually get "real" work done?

So how do you cut through the morass and design the most effective meeting possible?

In my consulting and leadership development practice, I design and run lots of meetings. I've learned simple secrets over the years for saving loads of time crafting the agenda and making sure everyone's clear on the purpose, objectives, and process of the meeting.

Here are my top tips for supercharging your meetings so you save time, optimize effectiveness, and reduce the likelihood you'll need another follow-on meeting to get real results:

## Start with the End in Mind

The most successful meetings start with the end in mind. If you're clear on the outcome of the meeting before you have it, it's way easier to ensure you get it. Define your meeting objectives before doing

anything else. Clear objectives help guide who should even be invited to attend, how much time will likely be needed, and what you need to do during the meeting to achieve your desired results.

## Pick Participants Wisely

It's one thing to be "CC'ed" on an email. You take a quick glance and move on since you're really not needed for the reply. Inviting people to a meeting who don't really need to be there wastes everyone's time—and encourages multitasking when their minds start wandering, which disrupts the flow. The criteria for who should be in the room is simple: Is the person needed for essential information, their creative ideas, or to make a specific decision? If not, they probably should just get CC'ed on any notes after the meeting is over.

## Use a Flexible Template

When it comes to designing effective meetings, iteration is usually needed, which means you'll need to draft and re-draft your agenda. On top of that, most meetings don't go as planned, especially if they involve any aspect of creativity. Adjusting your agenda on the fly may be the difference between achieving your goals and falling short.

Whether prior to the meeting or while you're in the middle of it, changing the duration of a single agenda item has a cascading effect on the timing of the other agenda items that follow it—which means you need to recalculate and enter new start and end times, over and over and over again.

I've saved untold hours by developing an **agenda template using a spreadsheet** rather than using a static document. Why? It's possible to create formulas that allow for any modifications to automatically update the rest of the agenda. It's essential to use tools that can be

quickly changed based on shifting meeting priorities.

## Capture Actions, Owners, and Due Dates

Management guru Peter Drucker got it right when he said: "Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes." Without clear actions, owners, and due dates for completing actions, it's unlikely you'll see real results. Always end your meeting with a way to capture exactly who will do what by when. Schedule another meeting if needed, but before doing so, ask the group, "Do we need to meet again, or can we run with this now?"

It may seem obvious, but most managers and teams don't realize a simple fact: the most effective and successful companies know how to run the most effective and successful meetings. It's not rocket science, but it does take thought and intention—something hard to come by in today's frenetic work environment.

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## About the Author

Soren Kaplan is the author of two bestselling and award-winning books, *Leapfrogging* and *The Invisible Advantage*. He is a former corporate executive, an affiliated professor at USC's Center for Effective Organizations, and founder of **InnovationPoint** and **upBOARD**.

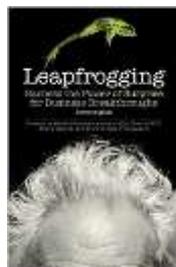
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Robert B. Tucker

# The importance of seeing it coming

In my travels this year, the one comment I'm hearing is "we just didn't see it coming."

The grocery industry didn't see it coming when Amazon suddenly jumped into their industry and 25 billion in market cap got erased overnight.

An insurance company in California didn't see it coming when the effects of climate change fuelled a raging wildfire that took out the entire town of Paradise, California, destroying 22,000 structures and rendering the firm insolvent.

A friend of mine in Boston didn't see it coming. He'd worked his way up the corporate ladder in the college textbook industry, to become senior vice president. He's running a \$200 million business unit, with a staff of 20 people – life is good. He's got two kids in college, a second home on Cape Cod, life is good. But over a three-year period, his unit's sales begin to plummet. The entire textbook industry was suddenly upside down due to students buying used textbooks and colleges converting to new digital business models.

One afternoon he's called into his boss' office and told his services are no longer needed. At 52 years of age, he's out of a job. He said, "Robert, I felt like somebody punched me in the stomach and I couldn't breathe."

It's stories like these that are why I'm so convinced that we all need to take a look at how we "see it coming." Call it what you will: strategic foresight, forward thinking, or managing the future. Whatever you call it, it's nothing less than an essential leadership mindset, skillset

and toolset for fast-changing and sometimes challenging times.

They don't teach you these skills in college.

"As a young person, you're not allowed to sit out the future," writes Sara Kessler, in her insightful book, *Gigged*, about the emerging workforce. "When you see a trend coming down the pike, you know it's going to hit you." To say that trends will "hit" us sounds like we're all at the mercy of developments. I would argue that developing a personal "see it coming" future scan system allows us to dodge bullets, but also to make better decisions and shape emerging trends to our advantage.

If you contrast those companies who "didn't see it coming" with those who are jet skiing on the blue oceans of tomorrow, the fundamental difference is they aligned with emerging trends. They saw it coming just a little bit ahead of the pack and took action.

To avoid blindsides, I recommend you take 3 Actions:

- **Look ahead of the curve** – Track the trends and pay greater attention to the external environment. Beef up your information diet and endeavour to "get informed" rather than passively "be informed."
- **Think ahead of the curve** – Take the time to connect the dots, look for patterns of change, and emerging opportunities. Ask: where will this trend, technology or Driving Force of Change be in 10 years and what might I need to do in response?
- **Act ahead of the curve** – Don't wait for a trend to overwhelm you, take responsive action today. Disrupt yourself. "We must be willing to learn, unlearn and relearn to get ahead in this fast-paced digital world," notes Jeff Thomson, president

and CEO of the Institute of Management Accountants.

Leading ahead of the curve means pouncing on opportunities, taking calculated risks, and turning your understanding of where your industry and profession and business are going into concrete steps that take you from where you are today to where you will need to be tomorrow to profit from change.

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## About the Author

Robert B. Tucker is a renowned global futurist and innovation keynote speaker with a client list that includes over 200 of the Fortune 500 companies. President and founder of **Innovation Resource Consulting Group**, Tucker is an internationally recognized pioneer in the field of innovation, Tucker's highly interactive presentations lead audiences on a guided tour inside the world's most creative companies. Through stories and examples, Tucker shows leaders how to tap into the mindset, skillset and toolset to embrace change, discover opportunity and avoid obsolescence. Known for his in-depth customization, Tucker provides today's leaders with practical strategies, cutting edge insights, and inspiration to take action once back at the office.

A former adjunct professor at UCLA, Tucker's pioneering research in identifying the critical attributes of innovators became the acclaimed book *Winning the Innovation Game*.

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Marissa Levin

# How to find your work-life balance by following these 8 steps



Anyone who balances a full-time job and a demanding home life knows the challenges and importance of finding time to rest and recharge.

Today's work environment has permanently blurred the lines between our personal and professional lives, which requires us to be even more intentional and protective with our downtime.

Burnout and mental health issues have reached crisis levels, with **nearly 1 in 12 adults having depression**.

The number of hours we spend online checking email or engaging in social media platforms continues to grow. **Adults today spend an average of 11 hours online**.

What can we do to ensure we care for our physical and emotional health while still attending to personal and professional obligations?

These 8 steps can help even the most stretched person regain control over his/her schedules and restore a sense of calm to their daily life.

**1: Prioritize your health.** Safeguarding your health should be the highest priority. When we proactively care for our health, we mitigate larger health

challenges down the road.

#### How to do it:

- Schedule required annual doctor's visits and keep them. This comprehensive **list of check-ups** explains every appointment you need from your 20's to your 70's.
- Prioritize physical health. Join a gym class or fitness group to hold yourself accountable. Block the time on your calendar and treat your fitness commitment as an appointment you can't miss.

#### 2: Put buffers in your schedule.

Do your appointments bump up against each other? Take back control of your schedule.

#### How to do it:

- Include at least a 15-minute buffer before and after each appointment to accommodate any meetings that run long or start late.
- Schedule 45-minute meetings instead of 60-minute meetings. Focus on covering only essential topics and do as much pre-meeting prep as possible.
- Ensure every meeting has an agenda, and that only the essential people are there. Identify desired outcomes before the meeting to ensure everyone is on the same page.
- Once a month, schedule a totally blank day, with no pressure.

**3: Stay true to your agenda - not someone else's.** How much of your day is dedicated to fulfilling someone else's agenda?

#### How to do it:

- Start by saying "No." "No" is a complete sentence. Don't add someone else's obligations to your schedule if you can barely manage your own obligations.

**4: Schedule touchpoints with your friends.** Nothing puts life back into perspective than some fun or talk therapy with your friends.

#### How to do it:

- Schedule regular calls or lunches with your BFFs to remain connected to other parts of life besides work.

**5: Plan for long-term fun.** Do you have favourite activities you've put on the back burner because life is pulling you in a million directions? Carving out time for small escapes is essential to remaining engaged at work.

#### How to do it:

- Plan a vacation that occurs several months from now. Even if it's a small getaway, it will give you something to look forward to.
- Get reconnected to the most fun part of yourself by booking an activity that brings you lots of joy, such as a concert or theatre production.

**6: Get your sleep.** Sleep deprivation assaults all aspects of our health, including our mental and emotional state.

**How to do it:**

- Be selfish. If you're exhausted, go to bed earlier. Create an environment conducive to good sleep: no screens, no noise, good sleeping temperature, earplugs, eye mask, essential oils, music to help you drift off (I especially love the [Calm app](#)) - whatever you need to sleep. Work can wait, the family can do it all without you.

**7: Be OK with not getting it all done.** As your life gets busier, it's highly likely you won't ever complete your daily to-do list. That's ok! Somehow, you'll manage to address all of the high priority tasks and make it all work.

**8: Remember the power of your thoughts.** Finally, remember that it is not our situations that cause us stress. It is our thoughts about our situations that cause us stress. No one really knows what the future brings. Our speculation only fuels our anxiety.

**In Summary**

The busier life gets, the harder it will be to please others.

Our commitment to our health must be our top priority so that we can show up for others.

Life passes by very quickly. Spending your days in an exhausted, over-committed, and overly anxious state is often a choice. Take back the control over your life. The quality of your life lies in your hands.

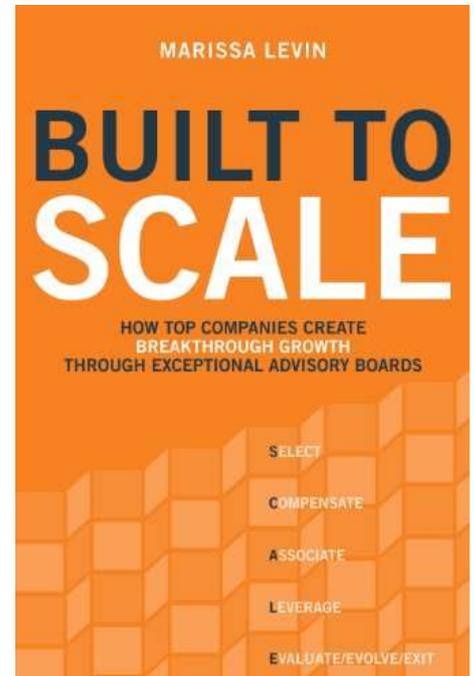
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**About the Author**

Marissa Levin is the founder and CEO of Successful Culture, which helps CEOs and leadership teams master the three most critical aspects of business growth: leadership development, strategy formulation and execution, and organizational culture assessment and improvement. She is also the author of *Built to Scale: How Top Companies Create Breakthrough Growth Through Exceptional Advisory Boards* and *My Company ROCKS! Eight Secrets to a Growth-Driven Culture That Keeps Employees Happy & Engaged*

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## Advisory Boards

The implementation of an advisory board is the one strategy that has made the biggest impact on the growth of Marissa Levin's multi-million-dollar, self-funded, global business.

After carefully researching the process she used to create a board that took her business to the next level, Levin created SCALE™, a patent-pending method that helps other business owners recruit, implement, and leverage their own business-altering advisory boards.

In *Built to Scale: How Top Companies Create Breakthrough Growth Through Exceptional Advisory Boards*, Marissa Levin uses her proven SCALE™ framework to guide you step-by-step as you build the advisory board you need to become an exceptional, connected, knowledgeable leader with a successful and profitable business. Whether you're a start-up or an established multi-million £ or \$ firm, Built to Scale™ will give you the knowledge and tools you need to succeed.

Debra Murphy

# 8 ways to differentiate your business



Small businesses have many **marketing challenges**. One of these challenges is how to determine what makes their business stand out from the competition. Being able to differentiate your business and communicating your unique capabilities that your competition does not have is paramount to attracting your ideal client.

When someone asks you what makes you different from your competition:

- Do you answer the question confidently, telling them why you are the best at solving their key challenge?
- Does your answer help your audience feel like you understand their needs?
- Do you clearly describe that special thing that makes you their ideal choice?

When you differentiate your business, you make it memorable and credible. It helps your prospects quickly understand what you do and what sets you apart from your competitors.

The secret to **creating your differentiation**, or unique selling proposition (USP) is understanding what your ideal client really wants and making sure you deliver it better than anyone else. Don't be fooled – this exercise is not easy to do. It takes a lot of thought, brainstorming and sometimes some trial and error to

see what works. Sometimes we are just too close to our businesses to truly see that differentiating quality that makes us stand out.

Plus, you may find what is unique for your business evolves as your business grows.

### Simple exercise to help you differentiate your business

Take some time to really think about the following and come up with a list of things you do really well. Don't underestimate anything because something that you do that is so simple may be just the key to you standing out above all others:

- What do your clients really appreciate about your service?
- Why are long term clients still with you?
- What was one of the nicest things a client ever said about how you conduct business?

The challenge for service businesses is to clearly identify what you do best in a way that is visible to your target. Consultants, accountants, financial planners, coaches, designers, web developers and other service oriented businesses appear to all be the same: they offer the same services for about the same price. Stand out by really understanding what you do best and exploit it. Or come up with something unique that adds value over your competition that you can offer.

### 8 ways to make your business stand out

Use the following ideas to help you determine that one unique, differentiating quality that only your business has:

#### Narrow your target market

By specializing in a specific customer niche, you can focus on the skills or services that uniquely benefit that customer. Being the best to provide a solution to their unique situation enables you to maximize revenue and build stronger customer relationships.

#### Focus on superior customer service

Aim to create the **best experience for your customers**. From your initial proposal through final delivery of your product or service, be sure your customers are treated as if they were the only one you have.

#### Solve a problem

Find out what common problems your clients have and be the best at solving them. Make your solutions turnkey so you can solve their problems faster and with better results.

#### Be innovative

Continuously try to improve your customer facing processes to deliver better results to your target audience. Every industry evolves and so should your business. If you offer similar services as the competition, make the way you deliver them or how you work with your customers

unique. Try to get to the solution faster and more accurately than the competition can deliver.

### Create offers that are too hard to ignore

Be creative with your service packages and add so much value that it's hard to say no. If you offer training, give people access to a free module or a money back guarantee. If you have a membership site, offer a free trial for a month to try it out.

### Be known as the expert in your field

Build a reputation as the expert in your field through your blog posts, books, videos, training and other information products. People who truly have a problem to solve will want to work with the expert.

### Make it easy to do business with you

Work on your business model to make it easy as possible to work with you. Provide access to you via text or email 24x7. Simplify your contract or instead, use an engagement letter. Do whatever it takes to make working with you easy and convenient.

### Create a unique business model based on your values

Be transparent to your customers about things you do and why. A couple things I've done in my business is that I don't mark-up other vendors products and services and I don't join affiliate programs for anything involved with marketing so I can remain completely objective when I recommend them to my clients.

Notice I didn't put price in the list as a way to differentiate yourself. Although price can be used as a differentiating factor, it really isn't ideal in a service-based business. Who really wants to be the cheapest? Cheaper can evoke perceptions of lower quality, less breadth of knowledge or a less stable business environment.

### What makes your business different?

With all the tools, gadgets and platforms, the trend is to spend a lot of time on marketing execution. But one thing we must not forget is that regardless of the

channel of execution, you still need the basics of your marketing strategy in place or all of your efforts will be wasted.

Take the time to determine your strengths and communicate them to your target audience in a way that gets them to notice you above all else. Once you have defined and can demonstrate your unique difference, be sure to incorporate it into your messages everywhere.

What is your unique difference that makes your customers want to work with you?

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### About the Author

Debra is a marketing coach and mentor passionate about helping small business owners take control of a critical business asset – their online digital footprint – and use it to increase visibility and generate inbound leads. Through expert guidance and support, they achieve success by learning, incorporating and executing marketing activities that take their business from mediocre to marvellous.

Although experienced across all traditional marketing channels, Debra specializes in inbound marketing, a combination of search, social media and content marketing, enabling small businesses to create a larger digital footprint that increases their visibility and generates more quality inbound leads.

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# Emoticons

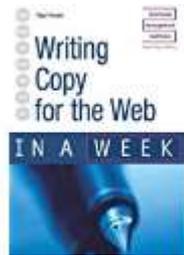
Also known as "Smileys", these symbols are used in emails and chat rooms to convey the body language, facial expressions, and vocal inflections we lack in electronic communication. There is a sample below - the number of emoticons is limited only by the characters on your keyboard and your own imagination.

**Note: most are viewed properly by tilting your head to the left. ;-)**

Symbol	Description
:)	Smile, Happy, Laugh
: )	Smiley without a nose
: -)	Smiley with a nose
:-D	Wide smile
:->	Sarcastic smile
:-(	Sad
:'(	Crying
>:o	Angry
:-{	Moustache
:-<	Fu-man-chu
:-\	Sceptical
:>	User is thinking
;) )	Winking happy face
B-)	User wearing glasses
8-)	wide-eyed, excited
:D	Laughter
o	Surprised
:-i	User is smoking
:-~i	more smoking
:-j	Smoking and smiling
:-!	more smoking
: / i	no smoking
:-y	Said with a smile
:-X	Lips are sealed
:-P	Bratty
:-:	Toothless
:-	Indifferent
:-B	User has overbite
(-:	User is left-handed
3:]	Pet smile
3:[	Pet frown
d:-)	Smiley with cap
{:-)	Smiley with wig
+:-)	Smiley priest
=:-)	Smiley punk rocker
>:->	Devilish smiley
0:-)	Angel
>:->	Winking, devilish
:-*	Kiss
:-{ }	big lips

Nigel Temple

# Low cost marketing strategies



Some of the most effective marketing strategies are either free or are low cost. It takes just a little imagination! Here are some examples for you to consider.

## Form alliances

Find (non-competing) companies which already have customers in your target markets. Offer to promote their businesses (for free) if they will do the same for you. Mutually beneficial ideas include reciprocal website links, including their marketing collateral in your mailshots (and vice versa) and recommending each other, when the opportunity arises.

## Build Trojan Horses

Choose a product or service, which you can provide for free, or at a low cost (e.g. consultancy). Use this as your *Trojan Horse* to enter a market / kick-off business relationships. Once you have established a relationship (via your Trojan Horse), you will be up and running.

## Produce information products

In competitive marketplaces customers need help and information. Why not position yourself as the most helpful enterprise around by producing information products? These products comprise useful, helpful and interesting information. This type of information acts as a magnet for buyers.

## Get up and speak

Public speaking is a great way of finding new customers. There are a huge number of opportunities for good speakers. If you need a little help with your speaking skills, join your local Toastmasters ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)). You can

then enhance your skills in a non-threatening environment.

## Write articles

Articles are a great way of raising the profile of your enterprise. Try to write and place one article a month. It's surprising how quickly this will get you noticed. If you need help with writing, find an independent copywriter. When your article appears in print, ask the publisher to quote for reprints.

## Stay in touch

You must keep in touch with contacts, dormant customers and current customers. Many companies don't communicate on a regular basis. The result - customers simply drift away because they don't feel loved. Inexpensive ways of keeping in touch include permission-based email marketing and postcards.

## Email marketing

The right way to go about this is to build your own opt-in subscriber list. Every month or so, send your subscribers some interesting, relevant and helpful information. There is no need for a hard sell. When the time is right, your subscribers are very likely to buy from you. After all you have positioned yourself as a customer orientated organisation haven't you?

## Cherish your advocates

Do you know who your advocates are? These are the people that recommend you. Reinforce their altruistic behaviour by thanking them and letting them know that you appreciate them.

## Launch a referral system

Most of us are nervous about asking for referrals. This is

because we are frightened of rejection. However, you must get into the habit of talking about referrals, with everyone you do business with. A great way of starting the referral game is to give referrals, which will start a mutually beneficial cycle.

Good luck with your marketing!

### Tip:

always ask how people have found you: this will reveal who your advocates are.

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This article first appeared in **Better Business Focus** in **November 2005**

## About the Author:

Nigel Temple is an independent marketing consultant, author, trainer and speaker. He has helped over 3,000 enterprises to improve their marketing results, over a 30-year period. He holds an honours degree in marketing from Greenwich University. His first book, *Writing Copy for the Web*, was published by Hodder & Stoughton. Nigel has provided marketing advice to numerous organisations, both large and small. He delivers marketing seminars and speeches throughout the UK.

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Drayton Bird

## Would you have the guts to do this?

Maybe you sometimes think I'm talking piffle but are too polite to say so. Thank goodness I do get it right every now and then.

This is an unedited comment from a reader:

*"You make excellent points in this email, and I have experienced this myself in my own business.*

*If you don't mind, I would like to share my own personal story.*

*I started out as a "discount" provider and it was miserable. I attracted the worst possible customers and the more I gave the more they wanted, but at no extra cost to them mind you.*

*My customer satisfaction rate was abysmal, my job satisfaction was non-existent... along with my profits.*

*I was doing what I loved and hating every minute of it.*

*Finally, I said enough is enough. I raised my prices by 500% and established very clearly that I compete on quality and nothing else.*

*I lost 90% of my customers overnight. But the ones that stayed, and more importantly the new ones that suddenly appeared... attracted by my higher rates like moths to a flame, more than made up for it.*

*Before I raised my rates, I was working 12-hour days 7 days a week for miserable people - impossible to satisfy who viewed not just my service, but myself as a commodity and losing money while I did it.*

*Now, since I raised my rates, I have clients who view me and my service as something special and feel like they are still getting tremendous value.*

*I work just 7-8 hours a day, 5 days a week (and am working hard to bring that down to just 5 hours a day 4 days a week) and the last 4 months have been the most profitable in the history of my company. In fact, the last 3 months my company has earned more than it did in the 18 months previous to the price hike!*

*Thanks Drayton for all the wonderful insights - Ash Goodman."*

Well if you'd like some more insights from me, [just go here](#).

Best,

Drayton

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### About the Author

In 2003, the Chartered Institute of Marketing named Drayton Bird one of 50 living individuals who have shaped today's marketing. He has spoken in 53 countries for many organisations, and much of what he discusses derive from his work with many of the world's greatest brands. These include American Express, Audi, Bentley, British Airways, Cisco, Deutsche Post, Ford, IBM, McKinsey, Mercedes, Microsoft, Nestle, Philips, Procter & Gamble, Toyota, Unilever, Visa and Volkswagen. In various capacities – mostly as a writer – Drayton has helped sell everything from Airbus planes to Peppa Pig. His book, *Commonsense Direct and Digital Marketing*, out in 17 languages, has been the UK's best seller on the subject every year since 1982.

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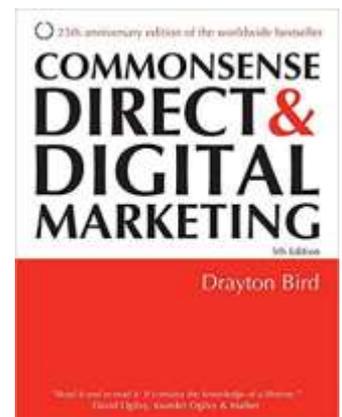
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