

Better Business Focus

September 2018

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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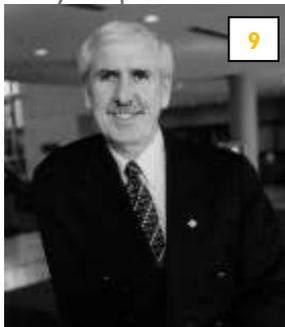
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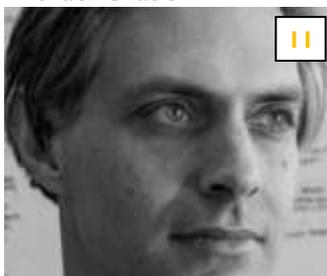
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Drayton Bird

Why didn't this copywriter take Einstein's advice?



Do you correspond with many people?

I do, because I often learn something, or something grabs my attention.

This morning a friend sent me a piece by a copywriter.

It was called The Seven Deadly Skills of a Great Copywriter.

It was all basic stuff - and none were deadly.

Except for one fatal omission: No examples of his work or results he got for clients.

"Example is not only a way to teach; it is the only way to teach" - Einstein

When you sell you are teaching people your proposition.

People learn by example and repetition.

That's why it's never enough to make your promise once.

You must do so at least three times - preferably in slightly different ways so you don't bore people.

When you join me on October 25th I will deluge you with examples.

If there isn't something that relates to your challenge, just ask me.

After 60 years selling all kinds of things from complex measuring equipment to baby's toys...

All over the world from Finland to California to New Zealand...

At prices from pennies to millions...

I usually find an example to help you.

But you must be there.

And you must reserve your place now...

Because - guess what? - the ticket price is going to go up.

So why not reserve your place now, this very minute?

There are only 100 places.

Delay could be deadly.

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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Anthony Mills

The Undeniable Power of the “Garage Experience”

If you’re like me and a lot of other entrepreneurs and intrapreneurs around the world, then you’ve likely romanticised – at least at some point in time – about what it must have been like in great companies like Apple, HP, Google, and Cisco when they were just getting their start – in their founders’ **garages** of all places (or in some cases in their parents’ garages).

We, too, long for that same experience... those long grungy days tucked away in a hot stuffy garage experimenting, failing (time and time again), until eventually we hit upon the one big **a-ha** that ultimately leads us to business fame and fortune. We call this – not surprisingly – **The Garage Experience**, and its pursuit – however potentially elusive – is a very powerful motivator for the self-starters out there. So much of a powerful motivator in fact that it’s one of the big reasons why so many start-up founders hold such strong **survivorship bias** in their minds when starting out.

The reality, however, is that most people – even many highly driven ones – are never going to do this. They are never going to invent the world’s next great thing in their garage and become rich and famous in the process. They just don’t have everything it takes to do so, including in many cases the right timing and scenario in history.

And they know it.



The HP Garage: Creative Commons - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/bragadocchio/1234911722>

And so they go to work.

In corporations. All over the world. Day in and day out. But alas! There is **hope**. Hope, indeed, for all of the world’s would-be **intrapreneurs**. That hope lies in the **open corporate innovation lab**. Not the cordoned-off workspace of the business’ formal Innovation Group (that’s usually the *closed* Corporate Innovation Lab). Rather, this innovation lab is freely open to everyone to use – to hack and to experiment in, trying to find that one next big idea for the business to leapfrog on. Labs like the Google Garage for example –

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=efusv7aMc4A&t=56s> – where anyone in the business can come and try things out. A place so buzzing with activity that people cannot help but bump into one another and compare their ideas, leading to further serendipity yet as they combine ideas and insights together. Open innovation labs like this bring **The Garage Experience** inside the four walls of the corporate business environment – freely available for everyone to use and experience. And beyond the ideas it spawns, its impact on **engagement** can be powerful as well, especially when aligned with a compelling sense of **purpose** within the business – one

that creates absolute clarity around the **WHY** behind these endeavours.

The real value of the lab, therefore, is not just in the potentially lucrative new business **ideas** it spawns (though that is often reason enough). It is equally in the level of **engagement** it is able to drive within the organization (which often experiences a noticeable bump when these labs are opened). It thus carries a double-whammy impact for the business, and almost always therefore represents a net positive investment for the business, so long as the organization is aligned culturally to support its endeavours, including funding some of them for formal development and consideration.

There is a clear argument to be made then, within most mid to large organizations, for having such an open innovation lab... for gifting your organization with The Garage Experience. Indeed, in many cases, this decision is a no-brainer, assuming that other things are in place culturally and procedurally to support the lab's endeavours.

But it is also equally important that these labs are designed properly, and that staff are trained on how to use them in ways that extract the greatest value from them for today's types of challenges.

More specifically, whereas the **R&D lab** of yesterday needed only be capable of mocking up and simulating **products** – and in certain cases **services** – the **open innovation lab** of today must be capable of mocking up and simulating **customer** and **business experiences**. This means three things. First of all, certain spaces have to be designed to accommodate new types of experimental activities, especially around user and design research. Secondly, appropriate types of materials have to be stocked to use, along with appropriate tools to work with them. And thirdly – and perhaps most importantly – the people using these labs have to be taught how to go about building **Behavioural** and **Experience Prototypes** and how, thereafter, to undertake Design Methods like **Bodystorming** and **Informance** (role playing) with the mock-ups.

For the modern open innovation lab, this is often the **MLR** – the **minimum learning requirement** – if it is to be the real cradle of innovation that real garages have historically been.

I can attest – from my own work in designing these labs – that when done **right** – and when underpinned with the right **cultural foundations** (mandatory, not optional) – they really do deliver the Garage Experience – long grungy days and all – and they really do pull back the covers on lucrative new opportunities for the business to consider.

There is one **caveat** however, and it is cultural in nature. Do not institute such a lab if the business is not truly serious about entertaining what comes out of the lab... if it is not going to give serious consideration to funding and supporting some of the ideas for at least more formal development and analysis – with hopefully a few being implemented / commercialized. If the business is not serious about doing something with this lab's outputs, then the lab will just become one more (soon forgotten) piece of **innovation theater** that no one uses. So, don't do these labs for "show and tell" to your corporate investors. Rather, do them for delivering real value to your customers and markets. And do them for giving your organization a sense of purpose, and something else to be very proud of.

So get going! Get your lab designed and set up right, get your people trained, and get busy creating the Garage Experiences that will engage your organization and reward your top line with significant new growth. Most likely, you won't be sorry that you did. Just make sure you've got the culture part figured out first, as that is always the prerequisite to any of these efforts.

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About the Author

Anthony Mills is one of the world's foremost authorities on strategic innovation and hyper-growth strategies. He has taught, consulted, written, and lectured on these all over the world.

Anthony is the Founder and Chief Executive Officer of Legacy Innovation Group, a strategic innovation consulting firm serving clients from all over the world. Legacy Innovation helps companies tackle their biggest and most pressing growth challenges and become relentless innovators.

Anthony also serves as the Executive Director of the Global Innovation Institute (Gini), the world's foremost accreditation and standards body in the field of business innovation. GInI provides certifications globally to individuals and businesses whose lives depend on making innovation work in the real world.

Anthony's work builds on 30 years of leadership in business, design, product development, marketing, engineering, and manufacturing.

He remains deeply embedded in each of these worlds, giving him a broad and holistic perspective that is rare among business leaders. He knows how to bridge these disciplines to deliver innovations that have a lasting impact on the business and its markets.

Anthony also knows how to build and drive winning innovation strategies. In his work, he uses strategic innovation to ensure the ongoing relevance and long-term resilience of businesses. Equally important, he knows how to transform businesses into human-centred networks capable of constantly delivering new value to their markets. His methods for strategy, culture, and process have enabled business leaders all over the world to make lasting transformations in their businesses.

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Debra Murphy

Email list building: 6 tips to convert visitors to subscribers



Email list building is an important part of your inbound marketing effort. Even with all of the new marketing channels, the importance of building a quality list of interested subscribers is as strong as ever. In fact, according to **Smart Insights State of Email Marketing Infographic**, over 50% of marketers rate email marketing more effective than other marketing channels.



Email list building, however, is just the beginning of the inbound marketing process. As a reminder, the inbound marketing process includes:

- Attract – create great content that drives traffic to your website
- Convert – get these visitors to become a known lead
- Nurture – build a relationship with the lead that turns them into customers

- Delight – continue to provide value to your customers to turn them into fans

Some effective email list building techniques:

Make your signup form easy to find and fill out

It's hard to believe that there are still websites that have signup forms that are hard to find. Visitors who don't see your form and offer can't convert. Be sure to display your form prominently on your website:

- At the top of the sidebar
- In the navigation bar
- In your footer
- In a pop up or feature box
- In a bar at the top of your page
- At the end of a blog post

Now make the form easy to fill out. The important piece of data is the email address. If you're trying to build an opt-in email list, you really only need the email address. If you want to personalize your emails, ask for their first name. But don't ask for what you don't need. Less is more in email list building tactics.

Use a strong call-to-action and a compelling lead magnet

You may have the best content in your blog, but most people won't sign up for your email list unless

you ask them to. Give people a reason to sign up. An eye-catching **call to action** that elicits an immediate response such as watch a video demo, download a useful tool or join our challenge.

Couple that with a compelling **lead magnet** that provides something of value to a prospect in exchange for their contact information.

When these two work together, you will encourage visitors to opt-in to your email list and give you permission to send them more useful content.

Offer content upgrades

Content upgrades are highly targeted content offerings aligned with specific blog posts. These lead magnets work because they are not generic email lead magnets but are additional incentives for signing up for your list.

The reason these offers convert at a higher rate than your evergreen lead magnet is that they are specific to what the reader is already consuming. Content upgrades can be:

- Templates and worksheets
- Checklists
- Lists of tools and resources
- PDF of the post (for long form articles)

- Webinar replays
- Swipe files
- Transcripts (especially if you have a podcast or video)
- Quick start guides

Content upgrades take lead magnets a step further by offering timely, relevant content to what the reader is already researching. If this is something you want to implement, be sure to understand the technical details required to successfully deliver the content upgrades to your subscribers.

Set up a landing page to capture leads

If you are running a marketing campaign to drive visitors to your website with the specific goal to capture leads, you must use a **landing page**. A landing page should be aligned with your offer to reinforce your message and dramatically increase your conversion rate.

Using a landing page keeps your visitor focused on what you want them to do. If they land on a regular webpage, there are too many distractions that can interrupt the process and cause the visitor to leave without converting.

A landing page also provides more accurate data because they are only visible to those who click on the link from your campaign. If you land your lead generation campaign on a regular webpage, the analytics data is intermingled with regular website traffic.

The bottom line with lead generation campaigns: keep it simple, don't make people think, and guide your visitor through the action you want them to take.

Create something people want to sign up for

There are many ways to re-purpose your content into formats that can generate qualified leads.

- **Turn your content into a course delivered through an email series.** The content can be text, audio or video, whichever is easiest for you to create. Taking content you have already created and rearranging

it into an educational series can build your email list quickly.

- **Take this same content and turn it into a webinar.** Record the webinar and then offer it as a lead magnet.
- **Create a challenge.** Turn your skill into guided experience that helps people get to a specific end result. Challenges can be anything you can guide people through in a short period of time such as "Create your own WordPress website in 7 days", "Take the 30-day fitness challenge" or "Write your book in 8 weeks".

You get the idea. Break your expertise down into a step-by-step process that can be completed quickly. Challenges create a very targeted, high quality list of people who now know what you do.

Use Facebook to get more subscribers

There are several ways you can use Facebook to grow your email list:

- **Add your sign up form** to your landing tab on your Facebook Page to encourage new fans to sign up.
- Set your Facebook Page call-to-action button to sign up and send the visitors to a landing page.
- Add regular posts to your Facebook Page with your opt-in offer. Use an image of your offer in the post to get attention and encourage people to click on the post.
- Run Facebook ads to drive people to your landing page to sign up for your list. You can target people who have liked competitor's Facebook Pages or other businesses that reach your target audience. These people are more likely to want your lead magnet.

Depending on your business and the reason for you to grow your email list, you can use organic tactics or increase your list quickly through Facebook advertising.

Email list building – an ongoing marketing activity

Email list building is an activity that small businesses should be doing regularly. It is the critical first step in your inbound marketing strategy. Be sure to not just drive

traffic to your website, but to get people to sign up. Don't waste time gaining traffic with no visible results.

Having an email list built on people who are interested in what you have to offer and have given you permission to send them information is a valuable asset for your business, **but your work is still not done**. Now that you have started to build your email list, you need a plan to provide valuable information to them and keep your business top of mind.

What other creative ideas do you have to build a quality email list for your business?

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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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Rob Garibay

Top 3 priorities when hiring the best employees

As a business coach, I have mentored and coached CEOs from around the country. The #1 complaint I receive from chief executives is, "I can't find good people!"

The hard pill that every successful business leader has to swallow is that you get the people you deserve!

The right people in your business team will make or break your company. On average, frontline employees account for 90% of a company's profits. Understanding how to hire A-player employees on your team is a game changer for most businesses.

One of the top keys to the success of any company's hiring process is understanding the top 3 priorities for hiring.

A very common hiring problem you may be doing: Many employers hire employees for skill. They will hire the most talented person in their field. But why do most companies fire employees?

Answer: character issues
Character issues can be stealing from the company, lying to a client or boss, being the wrong fit for the company culture, or being disruptive in the workplace.

Many companies hire for skill, but fire for character. Why not hire first for character?

Here are the top 3 priorities to hire in order of importance:

1. Character:

This is the moral quality distinctive to an individual. There are many tools to assess a potential employee's character.

I recommend the **Step One Survey II** to all of my clients. This is a comprehensive assessment that evaluates 4 major areas of character: Integrity, Work Ethic, Propensity to Substance Abuse, and Reliability.

2. Personality:

It is vital that your position matches your potential employee's personality style. For example, you would not want a highly outgoing, big picture thinker for a position where they will be locked in a room by themselves analyzing detailed information.

I recommend all of my clients take a deep look into **DISC Theory** to understand what type of personality would be best suited for the position.

Then, have your candidates take the **DISC Personality Assessment**. This is a systemized assessment that can help hiring managers understand the unique personality traits and behaviours of individuals in order to make the best decisions in hiring.

3. Skill:

This is their ability, expertise and experience in this position.

Obviously, it is important that your new employee be skilled in his or her new position. Though very important, this is not as important as character and personality. If your candidate is very skilled but has poor character and is not a good personality fit for the position, do not hire them. He or she will be a

bad hire and will cost your company a lot of money. Understanding these priorities coupled with following the best practices when hiring new employees will help you ensure that you get the right people on your team.

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About the Author:

Rob Garibay is a business owner, business expert & coach, certified with Gazelles International, ActionCOACH, and Engage & Grow, as well as a John Maxwell Founding Partner Leadership Coach. His professional career spans building businesses in manufacturing, R&D, distribution, retail, and IT. Rob has been a guest lecturer at The University of Oklahoma Price College of Business and also a weekly contributor to The Norman Transcript Sunday Business section.

Rob is the author of the book *Energize Your Profits* and contributing author to *Roadmap to Success*, both available on Amazon.com. He has achieved #3 ranking in the USA and #15 in the world among over 1400 ActionCOACH business coaches. Rob is a graduate of the Case School of Engineering, Case Western Reserve University. He co-founded and grew a technology business which he sold after 15 years.

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Barry Urquhart

The same old story – a drag on the future



It's an all-too-familiar tale.

Mass retrenchments, closure of premises, product withdrawals, corporate restructures and, yes, mergers, acquisitions and liquidations.

The increasing trend and pace of shortening lifecycles for businesses, products and services reflect growing intrusion, impact and consequences of rapid change, disruption and innovation.

A recent public announcement by Telstra, Australia's largest telecommunication corporation, grabbed international media headlines. It was to retrench some 8,000 staff members (around 25% of its workforce) and would split its structure. That caught the attention of millions and carried explicit and implicit messages to business leaders and owners – no one or thing is immune to the evolving forces of the future.

SYMPTOMATIC CASE STUDY

Telstra's circumstances should not be reviewed in isolation. They are symptoms of encroaching realities for many sectors, professions and entities.

Disturbingly, the manifestations, consequences and ubiquitous presence of dynamic change are not being recognised, respected and planned for.

Public references to "shock",

"unforeseen" and "unexpected" are sad indictments of inadequacies of the visions and analyses of both internal and external leaders and experts.

Ongoing, periodic objective assessments, audits and forensic strategic analyses should be mandatory and programmed. They will not avoid the challenges of change but will provide time for allocation of resources and priorities to address and redress their direct, indirect and cascading impacts.

Many supposed business and strategic plans have an orientation or sole focus on the future. Some detail contemporary, comparative analyses. Often overlooked is the past, and the genesis of the entity, its product/service range and that of the sector in which it operates, and to those to whom it seeks to serve. Therein lie many questions and countless answers.

THE ROOTS OF THE MATTER

Beyond the narrow focus of Telstra is a telling story.

Telstra in its own right is worthy of contemplation. It has lost its dominating and monopolizing presence.

Selling off and losing control of one's supply chain is fraught with danger and has intermediate to long-term adverse consequences. The "cash-rush" from the sale of

its copper-based network to NBN (National Broadband Network) was not reflected in enhanced dividend payments to shareholders, or in the share price.

Indeed, the share value and, thus, the market capitalization of the corporation have more than halved during the two years to June 2018.

Telstra, which was consistently ranked (by capital-worth) in the top eight publicly listed companies on the ASX (Australian Stock Exchange) is no longer among the top 10.

Disposal of the former large revenue and profit generating *Yellow Pages*, appeared to have little impact on operations or value.

The roots of the Telstra family-tree appear to run deep. A landline telephone network, copper wires, "Yellow Pages" and, yes, call-centres. Each is reflective and tied to the past.

TRANSFORMATIVE FUTURE

The prospects for growth, resilience and reasserted competitive advantage for Telstra appear to centre on new and substantial pillars, being:

- The corporation's substantial shareholding in the on-line channels of Foxtel provides scope for penetration and

access, making the categorization of being a telecommunications company somewhat redundant.

- The leverage point of its Foxtel investment will inevitably be the rich rewards possible with the content that is produced and transmitted, rather than the transmission channels themselves: *like Netflix*
- It is conceivable, and reasonable, to forecast that the embracement and utilization of 5G technology will, to some considerable extent, make the NBN network obsolete, inadequate and relatively inefficient and expensive.

So much for the projected investment of around \$30 billion (currently \$58 billion, and still counting) without the advantage and evaluations of a cost/benefit analysis by a Labour Party Senator and party powerbroker. It seems the political party power was misplaced and poorly applied, and the numbers weren't counted.

NATIONWIDE ISSUE

The lessons learnt from the Telstra scenario have widespread relevance, with significant structural and societal implications. Look no further than the six largest corporations by market capitalization listed on the ASX.

Four are banks. In 2017 Westpac celebrated its 200th year of continuous trade.

BHP, the recently rebranded "The Big Australian" is there.

So too is CSL, the former government-operated Commonwealth Serum Laboratory, which is the youngest, at 102 years old! It is also the best performing and has been the fastest growing of the six, since its public listing in 1996.

Collective ageless beauty? I think not. It's a cause for concern.

The contrast with the six largest public listed USA corporations is striking: Microsoft, Amazon, Apple, Facebook, Twitter and

Google.

None were operating in 1985. Four had not been established in the year 2000, and each has in recent times stated they do not need banks or banking to transact business. They have their own payment systems.

And then there is Alibaba from China, which has similar attitudes and capabilities.

THE MESSAGE IS...

The restructuring, downsizing and thinning of Telstra is, it seems, a frontrunner for what will happen to the big four banks in Australia.

BHP is on the front-foot. It is rapidly embracing technology, artificial intelligence and automation.

Shareholders will be gladdened with the prospects for increases in production, reductions in staff numbers, enhanced revenues, margins, profits, dividends and share prices.

Who's looking back to the past? Hopefully, no one, other than to appreciate the path taken.

BE PROFESSIONAL

Casual or heightened interest in the Telstra, banking and mining industry case studies are insufficient for many public and private, big and small corporations, firms, partnerships and networks.

Detached observations need to be upgraded with disciplined, structured, committed and well-resourced engagement.

In recent times I have enjoyed the challenges, insights and positive outcomes from facilitating detailed strategic analyses and business development workshops for lawyers, accountants, dentists, pharmacists, engineers and veterinary surgeons.

A new dawn is awakening for each discipline.

The future has arrived and it's spelled: Digital

It's time for all commerce to extract the digit.

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About the Author:

Barry Urquhart, Managing Director, Marketing Focus, Perth, is an inspiring speaker, author of Australia's top two selling books on customer service and an international consultant on dynamic innovation and creativity. Barry is author of six books, including the two largest selling publications on service excellence in Australasia. He is a regular commentator of consumer issues on ABC radio, is featured on a series of interview topics on "Today Tonight" and contributes articles to 47 magazines throughout the world.

He is one of Australia's most active keynote speakers and is an internationally recognised authority on quality customer service, consumer behaviour and creative visual merchandising. Marketing Focus is a Perth based market research and strategic planning practice. The firm and Barry consult to multinational, national and local entities in the private sector and the public sector. He is a former lecturer in Marketing and Management at the Curtin University of Technology and has degrees in marketing, political science and sociology.

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Michael Graber

The bigger the back end, the stronger the backlash

Be careful. When innovation gets real, people react in unpredictable ways.

People whom you thought were forward thinking recoil in reactionary conservatism. Others are willing to move a step forward but vigilantly cautious. The more concrete you get in detail, the stronger the reaction you receive internally.

The Back End of Innovation is where you host learning in-market pilots, where you plan to launch and scale an innovation in the market, and where you sell your organization on launching something that augments an existing practice or transforms your business model.

The last part is often the hardest—and also stands as the real test of whether or not a culture is sincere about their innovation program. The internal obstacle course becomes a dynamic, never-ending homework assignment.

You may end up writing an Opportunity Study, a Strategic Brief, a Cost/Benefit Analysis, a Business Case, a segmentation study, data on this and that, an ROI case on both actual and strategic value, and a launch plan before you get the trust, budget, and authority to launch even a pilot in one test market.

Most of these intensive studies are premature and unnecessary at this stage, just assigned to assuage internal fears, not an enlightened and empowering way to commission innovation work. If the organization has a clearly

defined Innovation Strategy and metrics, then you see less of this active anxiety: however, one truth resounds.

The larger the potential opportunity, even if it is centered in the core business or a close adjacency, the more it strikes a corporate nerve. The backlash begins.

After crashing into a wall of internal objections, pessimism, and well-intentioned “realism,” just in order to be granted the green light to move into an in-market pilot, you then meet with more formidable resistance if the pilot exceeds expectations. This is good news, really, although it sounds harrowing, exhausting. The concept is being taken seriously now.

As obvious as it sounds it is compassionate and kind to remember that no one is messing with you personally. They are vitally concerned with the new business opportunity and act as anxious as new parents over a newborn. In this scenario, you are merely the OBGYN or midwife who receive both gratitude and a long list of questions.

Watch out here comes the free advice part of the column: therefore, **do not blame the company**—just gently point out how it can mature their innovation discipline. **Do not blame the people** asking you for mountains of data and projections—they are just unused to working in this new framework and are projecting the tools and methods they have used in the past.

This is new territory. You and your teams are pioneers. The bigger the potential opportunity, the more it will bring up its opposite—this fact seems like a law of nature inside organizations. Honour the backlash. The prize is on the other side. As the old song says, “nothing left to do but smile, smile, smile.”

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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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John Niland

Staying ahead of your customers

Many professionals and businesses worry about staying ahead of the competition, but there are solid reasons why it's even more important to stay ahead of your clients / customers. If you want to charge more for your services, build long-term relationships and assert your position as a trusted advisor, it's important that your clients see that you are one step ahead of them.

Specific benefits include:

1: Your first meetings will be more compelling: you win trust and credibility by showing prospective customers what's around the corner.

2: Your fees / prices will be higher. You can overcome pricing objections by referencing the risks of not hiring someone like you.

3: You are more likely be re-hired / extended by existing customers, who see you as an integral part of their future strategy.

I saw this vividly illustrated during July by working with a coaching client who works in technology. He had a fresh opportunity with a new client and was keen to win the contract. As we prepared for his first meeting with his

customer, it became obvious that — while his technical expertise was interesting from a quality perspective — this did not spell the necessary vital reason for that customer to buy.

He needed to do some research prior to his meeting: what might happen to an organisation that ignored this expertise? He found the answer readily enough: via a horror story from a competitor, where a director of operations had recently been fired due to reliability failures. So he made his meeting with the customer about reliability, not about quality. He arrived equipped with some numbers. He talked about how the future would be different to the past. His contract starts this month.

Taken together, the above reasons are compelling. But there is another intangible benefit which, for many professionals, proves even more exhilarating.

Simply put, when you are a step ahead of your clients, professional life becomes more fun and engaging. You negotiate with fresh clarity and confidence. You are less anxious about first meetings. You know your value in the marketplace.

For these reasons, the entire VCO autumn schedule features events that put you ahead of your clients.

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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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Tom Koulopoulos

One thing all successful people have in common



I was speaking with a good friend recently and she shared with me something that triggered a thought about what makes people successful and happy. If you're an innovator, pay close attention, this is especially relevant to you.

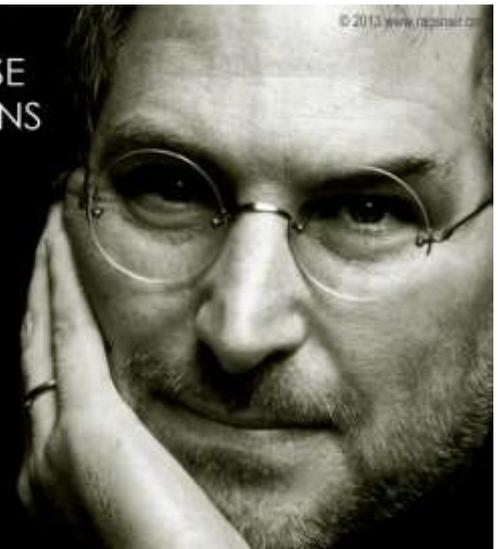
Stick with me because this is perhaps the most important lesson I've learned about success and which I can pass on.

I've had the great privilege to work with and for some incredibly successful people. From billionaires such as Ross Perot and Larry Ellison, to best selling authors and management icons such as Peter Drucker and Jim Champy, to countless CEOs and founders. Each one was very different as a person but they also shared some common traits. Of course, they were all driven, smart, and charismatic. They were each great leaders in their own right. But above all else there was one thing that was unwavering in everyone. I'm going to hold off on sharing that trait because I'd like to first ask you to think about a simple question. But here's the thing, you need to be brutally honest in answering it, because that's the only way you'll gain any insight from what I'm about to share.

How often do you look for external acceptance of your decisions, sometimes even going so far as to allow an important decision to be made by someone else just because

"DON'T LET THE NOISE OF OTHER'S OPINIONS DROWN OUT YOUR INNER VOICE."

Steven Jobs



you're unsure of your convictions while they are so persistent in theirs?

I know your initial response is going to be "Of course not! Me? Never!" But, again, be totally honest with yourself. Nobody will see your answer but you.

Look, I know that all of us have moments of doubt and uncertainty—it's the human condition.

But if you are seeking, perhaps even longing for, external acceptance for the really big decisions you've made, or are making, then you really need to understand the root of what's at play, because otherwise you will be undermining your long term success and happiness in the most insidious way imaginable, by building a fortress within which you will be held hostage by the acceptance of others.

Guess what, great leaders, great innovators, and truly happy people, have already given themselves that acceptance from the inside. I'm not

saying that mediocre people who lack the skills and knowledge can make great decisions just by being stubborn. If you're mediocre, incompetent, and stubborn good luck, I can't help you. I am saying that brilliant and competent people can abdicate their most critical decisions due to the insecurities that cause them to seek external acceptance.

The single most consistent trait in the most successful and happiest people I've known is that they don't seek acceptance. They do not allow others to hold them and their decision hostage inside a box of promises and assurances of certainty. In short, they are not seeking acceptance because they do not need to go outside for it, instead they have fully accepted themselves, they fully own their actions, and they pick their own path; they don't need to be sold a path, in fact they can't be! They are impervious to external pressure and perseverance.

Is this a guarantee of success and happiness? Of course not. But, in my experience, it is absolutely a prerequisite!

The single most consistent trait in the most successful and happiest people I've known is that they don't seek acceptance.

I'm sorry, am I being too harsh?

Am I expecting you to be superhuman?

Well, that depends on how high a standard you want to set for yourself. What I can tell you is that, like anything else in life, success and happiness are a journey of learning. We will all make mistakes. What's important is that we own our actions and learn from them; that we accept ourselves and our power to decide rather than let others make those decisions for us in our false quest for acceptance, affection, and validation.

So, what's the take-away? To be successful acceptance has to come from within. Otherwise it is simply not sustainable. Constantly seeking it from the outside will erode your integrity, happiness, and success. It will make you a lousy leader, innovator, and partner—constantly looking for reassurance, and it will leave you subject to the whims of others, who, by the way, have their own acceptance issues to deal with!

It's a tough lesson, but it's ultimately up to each of us to accept it and accept ourselves. I'd like to say the lesson is over; the article may be, but the lesson never is.

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About the Author

Tom Koulopoulos is the author of 10 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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Quotes from Steve Jobs, the founder of Apple Corporation

"Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower."

"A lot of companies have chosen to downsize, and maybe that was the right thing for them. We chose a different path. Our belief was that if we kept putting great products in front of customers, they would continue to open their wallets."

"The cure for Apple is not cost-cutting. The cure for Apple is to innovate its way out of its current predicament."

"I want to put a ding in the universe."

"Sometimes when you innovate, you make mistakes. It is best to admit them quickly and get on with improving your other innovations."

"Pretty much, Apple and Dell are the only ones in this industry making money. They make it by being Walmart. We make it by innovation."

"To turn really interesting ideas and fledgling technologies into a company that can continue to innovate for years, it requires a lot of discipline."

"You can't just ask customers what they want and then try to give that to them. By the time you get it built, they'll want something new."

"It's not about pop culture, and it's not about fooling people, and it's not about convincing people that they want something they don't. We figure out what we want. And I think we're pretty good at having the right discipline to think through whether a lot of other people are going to want it, too. That's what we get paid to do. We just want to make great products."

"It's really hard to design products by focus groups. A lot of times, people don't know what they want until you show it to them."

"Innovation has nothing to do with how many R&D dollars you have. When Apple came up with the Mac, IBM was spending at least 100 times more on R&D. It's not about money. It's about the people you have, how you're led, and how much you get it."

"Design is not just what it looks like and feels like. Design is how it works."



Ron Kaufman

New insights on “state of the connected customer” worldwide

A unique report was recently released by Salesforce Research titled “**State of the Connected Customer, 2nd edition**”.

This is an important publication with insights from 6,700 consumers and business buyers on the intersection of customer experience, use of technology, and the creation and development of trust.

UP! Your Service is a long-term and satisfied customer of Salesforce. But it’s important to know that the 6,700 people interviewed for this report were not limited to Salesforce customers. They represent different customers, from different generations, different genders, different company sizes, different levels of education, and come from 19 countries representing every region of the world.



No matter where you are located or what industry you are in, understanding these insights matters for your business and future success. Salesforce Research summarized the key findings into four points:

1. Customer Expectations are Hitting All-Time Highs.

OK, no surprise here. With global competition and rapid



commoditization in every sector, business and retail customers simply have more choice – and therefore much higher expectations of the companies they choose.

In fact, 76% of customers say it’s easier than ever before to take their business somewhere else.

This holds true in every geographic market, and for both B2B business customers, and for B2C retail consumers. With our clients, on our website, and in our blog we talk about this, using a service principle called **The Six Levels of Service**. This principle details how customer expectations are constantly rising, and how the challenge for every company is to keep adding value, keep improving, keep stepping up.

This fundamental principle must be understood and applied by everyone throughout the organization. Internal service teams and external customer facing teams working together in a culture where everyone is stepping up together.

2. Companies Face a New Connected Mandate

There are a lot of companies and a lot of customers, and a whole lot of commerce going on. But today’s customers want to be understood and respected as individuals. 84% of customers say being treated like a person, not a number, is very important to winning their business.

This can be a big challenge for teams inside your company who may be accustomed to only owning one stage of the customer journey. Customers judge companies based on their experience as a whole — not just interactions with individual departments — and they expect consistency in that experience.

With our clients, we use a very effective tool to help teams understand this called **Perception Point Maps**. This tool, when applied by teams in a Service Excellence workshop, gets everyone on the same page about who we are serving, and how we can work together to deliver the consistency and quality of experience that our customers expect, and deserve.

3. Technology Sets New Benchmarks for Innovation

Innovation has become the standard. It is normal and expected for connected customers all over the world. In fact, 59% of customers say companies need cutting-edge digital experiences to keep their business.

Artificial intelligence, internet of things, blockchain, cryptocurrencies, virtual reality, augmented reality, cloud services, sensors, voice activated and automated interfaces. Customers want all of this to give them more, easier, faster, and better customer service when they shop, when they buy, when they use, and when they need support.

At UP! Your Service, we address this by taking our earlier idea of **The Six Levels of Service** and connecting it to the idea of the **Four Categories of Value**.



Now we can see the many ways that technology can add so much value to the customer experience.

For example, quickly selecting, improving, and customizing your **Primary Products**. Knowing what, and when, and where to use your **Delivery Systems**. Creating more value for customers with **Delivery Systems** that offer greater speed, flexibility, and convenience.

Providing a greater ease and comfort through the friendliness of your messages, the intuitive nature of your processes, and overall sense of customer confidence created by the **Service Mindset** demonstrated throughout their experience. And how technology can support the cultivation and continuation of your **Ongoing Relationship** with customers; by remembering them, reminding them, re-ordering for them, and usefully recommending new products and services to them.

67% of customers believe that good is going to come from your application of artificial intelligence, and 61% believe technology overall presents positive opportunities for society.

But, customer trust is a delicate thing; and a full 31% of customers say they are concerned about how companies will use new technologies. And this leads to insight #4.

4. Customers Balance Personalization and Privacy Amid a Crisis of Trust

Providing the experiences customers expect requires a new breed of technologies, and a thorough understanding of each customer's unique needs and expectations. And

that means collecting and analyzing data. Unfortunately, not all companies are earning customers' trust with these technologies and all this accumulation of personal data.

But the Salesforce report reveals, that customers are actually OK with companies holding and using their personal information if that company uses the information to better meet their needs and higher expectations.

In every region, large majorities are willing to share personal information (or in the case of business buyers, professional information) in exchange for personalized offers, personalized shopping, and consistent cross-channel interactions.

This means that every member of your team, in every situation and at every point of contact, must Take Personal Responsibility for ensuring that customers' data is gathered, analysed, used, and stored in ways that are ethical, truthful, and secure. This is not "some else's job" in the organization. Ensuring data privacy and protection is everyone's job.

So, in this challenging time and world, what drives loyalty?

When great products and services alone are not enough to secure loyal customers, then companies must go further. Salesforce asked consumers and business buyers what has the greatest impact on their loyalty. And here are the top three:

First, the overall experience customers have with you at every stage of every service transaction. Second, the success you help your customers achieve, and your investment in the relationship with them long after the deal is done.

And third, your careful protection and appreciation of the data they have entrusted you with to know them better and serve them better.

All of these insights, and more, are available for you to learn from in the **Salesforce Research "State of the Connected Customer"** report.

You can get your own copy free, online, and I recommend you do.

When you understand the insights in this report more clearly, you will see that responding to these issues requires more than good technology

and good intentions. You need a culture of responsible service throughout the organization to attract good customers and keep good customers.

Fortunately, there are proven Global Best Practices for Building Service Culture that you can learn about and apply. Visit the www.UpYourService.com website, where you can watch this presentation of this title on demand.

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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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Greg Satell

Don't be fooled by these 3 overhyped trends



The Gartner Hype Cycle shows a remarkably consistent pattern. A new technology is first ignored, then begins to show promise and expectations get inflated beyond any realistic assessment of value. That leads to disillusionment and the technology is almost forgotten until, some years later, it begins to make a true competitive impact.

What makes the Hype Cycle so pervasive is that it is, essentially, a pattern based on our obsession with patterns and stories, which is so universal that there is a whole branch of mathematics devoted to it. Our love of patterns is so great, in fact, that once we notice one we are often unable to disregard it.

The concept isn't limited to the technologies Gartner follows. At any given time there are a variety of trends and business ideas getting hyped. That's a problem because an enormous amount of time and energy is wasted when a trend is at maximum hype. Right now there are three major trends you need to watch out for if you don't want to get caught in the cycle.



1. Robots Taking Our Jobs

Ever since Brynjolfsson and McAfee's breakout e-book *Race Against The Machine*, the meme of robots taking our jobs has become a near obsession. From game-show playing supercomputer going to medical school to article writing software bots and cheap, collaborative robots in factories, it seems like our limited human abilities are losing the race.

The notion that automation reduces employment is nothing new, of course. It dates back at least as far as the Luddite movement in the 19th century. Yet so far, technology induced unemployment hasn't come to pass. In fact, although the workforce has doubled since 1970, labor participation rates

have risen by more than 10% since then.

Some argue that this time is different, because now machines are replacing cognitive skills as well as physical labor. That is, of course, possible, but so far there's no indication it's actually happening. In fact, the US is beginning to experience a labour shortage which is especially severe in manufacturing, where you would expect technology to have its greatest effect.

So, at least for the moment, we don't have to worry about robots taking our jobs, but the nature of those jobs are changing as social skills begin to trump cognitive abilities and collaboration becomes a competitive advantage.

2. The Platform Economy

Another recent obsession focuses on platform businesses. Firms like Uber and AirBnB have built billion dollar valuations in just a few short years. Business gurus practically swoon at how this new model dominates traditional “pipeline businesses” that are encumbered by old fashioned physical assets.

Look a little closer though and the picture is not nearly as rosy as it seems. Uber has blown through billions and still shows no signs of becoming profitable any time soon. It possibly never will. AirBnB represent less than 1% of the global hospitality industry. Clearly, there is far more money to be made in the other 99%. Hotel occupancy recently hit record highs, although room rate growth has slowed a bit.

Even Amazon is somewhat of a cautionary tale. It’s obviously a well-run company managed by one of the great management geniuses of our time. Still, until recently, it was a poor business earning sub-par margins. Lately, its profit picture has brightened considerably, but mostly due to its cloud computing unit, which looks far more like a pipeline business.

What’s truly important about platforms is that they allow us to access ecosystems of talent, technology and information far more efficiently than we ever could before. Some of that value will accrue to the firms that manage those platforms, but far more will go to everyone else.

3. The Retail Apocalypse

It seems like every time you turn around these days another major retailer is hitting the skids. Toy R Us recently filed for bankruptcy, major chains are closing stores and it’s becoming clear that many storied brands will not survive. It has been estimated that half of American shopping malls will go out of business by 2023.

Many are calling this a retail apocalypse, but look a little closer and it becomes clear that there is more to the story. Amazon has made a big push into physical retail, capped off by its \$13.7 billion purchase of Whole Foods. Others,

ranging from Bonobos to Warby Parker, also opened physical stores. So clearly the problem isn’t with retail itself, but the inability for legacy firms to adapt to a new model. What’s really going on is that the function of a physical location has changed from driving transactions, which can happen anywhere these days, to doing all the things that can’t easily be done online, like build relationships, service and upsell.

In some cases, traditional retailers are actually benefiting from the store closings, because commercial landlords have learned to be far more flexible, which allows for more experimentation with new concepts like pop-up shops.

Forget About The Hype And Focus On The Shift

Take a look at these overhyped trends and it becomes clear that our perceptions of them are heavily influenced by availability bias. We see robots doing human tasks and not the new jobs that are being created. We see platform businesses like Uber and AirBnB explode overnight and never ask if they are making money. We see retailers close, but don’t notice what’s opening up.

The truth is that value rarely disappears, it just shifts to another place. Knowledge workers become relationship workers. Platforms lower costs for pipelines. Large retail locations with stockrooms give way to “shoppable showrooms” that combine “high touch” experiences with same-day delivery.

So instead of getting consumed by the hype, we need to look for the shift. Managers need to shift their emphasis from individual performance to team performance. Businesses need to focus less on building proprietary value chains and more on widening and deepening connections. Retailers need to ditch outdated metrics like sales per square foot and take the entire retail ecosystem into account.

Today, everybody needs to learn the art of the shift. Disruption is nothing new, but today it happens much faster and the longer we cling to old models, the harder it is to solve new problems and the less likely we are

to survive. On the other hand, once we make the shift, the possibilities are endless.

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About the Author

Greg Satell is a popular author, speaker and innovation advisor, whose work has appeared in Harvard Business Review, Forbes, Fast Company, Inc. and other A-list publications. Over the last 20 years he has managed market leading businesses and overseen the development of dozens of path breaking products.

Greg helps organizations to grow through bringing “big ideas into practice.” He applies rigorous frameworks to identify the right strategies for the right problems, helps build an “innovation playbook” to tackle the challenges of the future and drive transformative change.

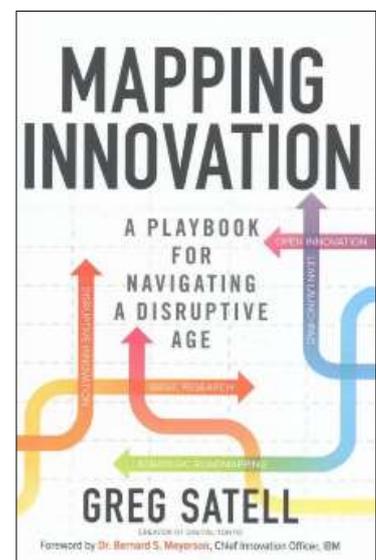
His first book, *Mapping Innovation: A Playbook For Navigating A Disruptive Age* was published by McGraw-Hill in 2017. In November 2017 Greg’s book made the long list for ‘The 2017 800-CEO-READ Business Book Awards Longlist’: <http://inthebooks.800ceoread.com/news/articles/the-2017-800-ceo-read-business-book-awards-longlist>

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Sunil Bali

No love handles



Cavemen had no cars, no computers and no love handles.

In their paper **Stone agers in the fast lane**, researchers at Atlanta University's School of Medicine say that our cavemen ancestors did cardiovascular interval training every day. These exercise sessions weren't optional because our ancestors were either searching and sprinting after prey or running away from it.

When it comes to stress, our system is designed to cope with problems that last for seconds and minutes- typically kill or be killed – and not months or years. Our DNA and brain haven't changed very much in the last 10,000 years.

The result is that 75% of deaths in Western nations can be attributed to "diseases of civilization" which were rare in our pre-agricultural ancestors.

There's a mismatch between our cavemen body and brain, and our modern world. Love handles can be removed with increased activity, but what about how our relatively primitive operating system – the brain – deals with stress?

How can we reduce our levels of stress and become more resilient?

Warren Buffet has a great solution. He books a meeting with himself at the end of every day, where he goes for a walk and thinks about how he has reacted or responded to issues during the day. Where Buffet finds that his thinking has caused him stress, he identifies any underlying beliefs, behaviours and habits that need to change.

This daily review process works best when your mind is still and you can tap into your innate intelligence, hence a walk away from all distractions is ideal. A daily *ME-eting* increases awareness, disrupts sub optimal thought patterns, and clears the way for new mental patterns which support what you want to achieve.

..... and you wouldn't want to function in your dysfunction would you?

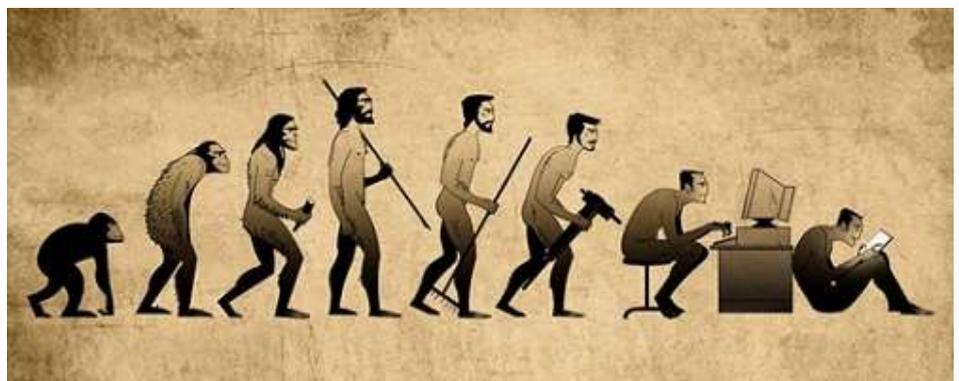
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About the Author

Sunil is a Performance Coach, Speaker and Author.

Ex Head of Talent for Vodafone Group and Santander, and having run a £50m business, Sunil has been responsible for hiring over 50000 people and has had the pleasure of working with some great entrepreneurs, professionals and leaders.

Moving minds - Transforming performance



As Buffet says, "The chains of habit are too light to be felt until they are too heavy to be broken, and we then function in our dysfunction."

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Janet Sernack

How can we prepare people for a future we cannot predict?

As so many of us are aware, we are living in an era of extreme rapid & continuous change, driven largely by the technological leaps of the Digital Age, impacting exponential shifts in customers needs, priorities, preferences & expectations that affect all of us, no matter what business we are in, or what kind of lives we lead.

“The accelerating pace of change is unfamiliar and unprecedented. To some, this change is a threat; to others, it’s an opportunity; for most, it’s both... and we’re all struggling to adjust to this new state of dynamic equilibrium”.

What is so often forgotten is that all these changes originate in the minds of human beings, for some, who see the changes as an opportunity the ultimate outcomes will be determined by human ingenuity. For others, who see change as a threat, it will be determined by complacency, panic, anxiety and fear, where people feel that everything they know & are familiar with, is under challenge.

So, how can we prepare people to make the fundamental choice between the future as a series of threats or as a field of opportunities, that cannot be predicted or controlled?

“The ultimate outcome will be determined not by the technology itself, but by human ingenuity, collaboration, and an explicit intention to try to make the world a better place.”

At **ImagineNation™**, we know that organizations who invest in becoming agile to speedily adapt to changing market demands, by embracing a strategic, systemic & human centred approach, achieve mastery at the interface between people & digitization.

“What we sometimes forget is that all this change originates in the minds of human beings. Disruption isn’t just happening to us; we are the force behind it. If individuals aren’t being creative and working disruptively, businesses and technologies aren’t going to change and disrupt either”.

We also know that building an organizational culture that embraces & embodies a values-based approach, focussing on trust, creativity & collaboration, enables people to collectively & equally comfortable with what can be known and with exploring what is unknown.

We also know that the leadership & teaming paradigms have shifted, creating an increasing need for innovation coaching, to fill people’s skills as well as their “knowing-dong” gaps to survive & thrive in an ever-changing world.

Playing in both the opportunity and threat fields

Involves people having permission to be creative & work disruptively, to do this, they need to firstly expand their capability, capacity & confidence for navigating change, developing adaptiveness & innovation agility, & also exploring new ways of connecting people & technology by:

- **Working at ways to “unfreeze” the status quo, & reduce people’s fears, discomfort and resistance, which allow for deviant & opposing views, to seek out the diversity & differences of thoughts & ideas within teams.**
- **Shifting from conventional ways of thinking & business as usual approaches, towards embracing risk & actively experimenting within a fail fast to learn fast context.**

Requiring leaders to demonstrate;

- Deep conviction in their passionate purpose when navigating positive change & uncertainty.
- Receptivity & readiness, empathy & empowerment in leading people & teams in the face of uncertainty.
- Emotional integrity in their embodiment & enactment of deep presence & the key values & attributes they wish to see in others.
- Customer & people centric ways of doing business balanced by commercial business acumen.
- Execution, digital & risk mastery.

Coaching innovation leaders & teams

It is more important than ever, to teach people to unlearn, through structured coaching processes, their habitual ways of being, thinking & doing. To create the safe space for people to learn how to embrace creative & collaborative ways of enhancing their bravery, boldness,

determination & courage in uncertain times by;

- **Imagining new possibilities boldly and optimistically, whilst simultaneously understanding they are quite likely to emerge sooner than expected.**
- **Pursuing amusement & wonder, whilst simultaneously trusting that smart risk taking allows people to learn fast from mistakes & failure.**
- **Unlearning knowing and doing what they have always done, whilst simultaneously adopting a beginner's mind to allow new learnings to occur.**
- **Being curious about the future & blend new ways of planning, including strategic foresight, scenario planning into conventional business planning.**

Key capabilities to prepare people for a future we cannot predict

Some of the key competencies we can teach & coach people to help prepare them for a future they cannot predict include;

- **Design, Creative & Critical thinking** to help them make sense of and perceive their worlds with fresh eyes.
- **Start Up Methodologies** to experiment with new business models, with iteration & pivoting new services, products & delivery streams that can be scaled & leveraged.
- **Generative Discovery Skills** in deep listening, questioning and debating to provoke & disrupt the status quo.
- **Teaming & Networking** to break down silo's, identify & maximize interdependencies, collaborate & build high value delivery eco-systems.

Making 24 minutes a day matter

In Josh Bersin's "The Disruption of Digital Learning: Ten Things we have learned" he revealed that employees are feeling "overwhelmed" and in reality, only have "24 minutes a day to learn".

To seriously prepare people for a future we cannot predict, then we must work harder at making people feel & believe that they matter. Doing this strategically & systemically, will energize, catalyze, mobilize and harness your people's receptivity to change & uncertainty & unleash their innovation potential.

What really matters is culture, people's career successes and coaching, where people feel safe, empowered & have permission to participate in on the job experiential learning, where they can learn from mistakes; supported by effective performance data and rewards systems within a culture of learning to imagine, create, capture and scale hidden value in an increasingly complex and dynamic world.

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About the Author

Janet is the Founder, CEO & Chief Catalyst of ImagineNation™ a generative and provocative global enterprise innovation consulting, education and coaching company that enables people to be, think and act differently. She has 29 years of experience consulting and leading culture development, change management, leadership and innovation education programs to some of Australasia's and Israel's top 100 companies in the retail, service, IT, telecommunications, financial services, building and manufacturing sectors.

Prior to launching her consulting, training and coaching career she was Marketing Development Manager for the 42 Grace Bros' department stores, which are now, part of the Myer Group. She then launched Australia's first design management consultancy and worked with some of the world's leading fashion and lifestyle brands including Orotan, Chanel and Seafolly.

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Predictions

"A prediction, or forecast, is a statement about a future event. A prediction is often, but not always, based upon experience or knowledge.

Although future events are necessarily uncertain, so guaranteed accurate information about the future is in many cases impossible, prediction can be useful to assist in making plans about possible developments; Howard H. Stevenson writes that prediction in business "... is at least two things: Important and hard."

Source: Wikipedia

Shelly Greenway

3 problems with positioning statements



The concept of positioning statements has been around for decades, however just because you know what positioning is, doesn't mean you understand how to do it.

The classic positioning statement is a fill-in-the blanks exercise where you create a single phrase that encapsulates what your offering is about relative to your competition.

It usually looks something like this:

FOR target buyers, your offering
 IS A market category WHICH PROVIDES main benefits
 UNLIKE primary competitor WHICH PROVIDES competitor's benefits

There Are 3 Main Flaws With Positioning Statements

1. They assume that the positioning for your product or service is magically locked inside your head and you just have to write it down.

The truth is that every product can be positioned in a multitude of ways. Which one you choose will have a massive impact on your business. The positioning statements exercise encourages you to assume that there is only one way to position your product or service – this is a very dangerous assumption!

Let's look at an example to illustrate the point.

Imagine you are Ribena and you decide you're going to make your ubiquitous blackcurrant drink into a "no sugar" version because sugar is starting to get loads of bad press. You would have made a set of critical decisions about the business opportunity.

These include:

- **Target buyers and sales channels** – adults wanting a low-calorie fruity soft drink while they're on the go – food to go aisles of supermarkets, petrol stations, newsagents etc.
- **Competitive alternatives** – other diet or low-calorie drinks
- **Pricing and margin** – you won't be likely to charge much more than other diet drinks, since you'll be sold alongside them
- **Key product features** – because you are fighting a war for the hearts and minds of weight conscious sweet drink lovers, your product differentiator will need to appeal to them. You might make claims like "only 20 calories" or "same great taste with less calories".

Now suppose instead of deciding to make a "no sugar" version for adults, you decided to make it for kids. The product hasn't changed—it's exactly the same liquid, but almost everything else about your business has changed.

Why? Because we changed the frame of reference around the product:

- **Target buyers and sales channels** – mums wanting healthy drinks for kids lunch boxes and picnics – supermarket take-home squash aisle
- **Competitive alternatives** – you are now competing with other kids drinks
- **Pricing and margin** – as these are products to be stored in home, you might be able to get the mum to stockpile them, and therefore sell more of them at a time
- **Key product features and roadmap** – you are now fighting for the hearts and minds of mums who want healthy "treat" drinks for their kids. They're likely not worried about calories, but more about the things like sugar which make their kids hyper! Perhaps the drink needs to be in a smaller bottle or with a spill proof spout, or maybe Mums need reassurance that the drink contains some goodness, like vitamin C.



If I'm Ribena, which frame should I choose? Did I even consider adults vs. kids? The answer is important and will fundamentally change the opportunity. Everything is different, except the liquid inside the bottle. The name, the visual positioning, the claims, the structure, the retailers and buyers you pitch it to. So, pre-deciding the frame of reference is a big flaw, but there are two others.

2. They are forgotten as quickly as they're written

The output of the exercise is an awkward Frankenstein statement of gobbledygook that cannot be easily shared, understood or used by the teams that need to use it. It's too vague and conceptual and nowhere near directional enough. It also severely lacks any inspiration that will excite and galvanise the business behind it. Like other totally useless business exercises, it is completed and never referred to again. It's a total waste of time.

3. They assume markets are static

Creating a positioning statement gives you the false sense that you are "done" doing positioning. Markets change because companies, technologies and consumers change – all of the time.

Great positioning often becomes weak over time. Positioning cannot be a one-off exercise.

So, What Should You Do Instead?

Without hesitation, bin the positioning statement! Instead, start to think expansively about all the possible opportunities that are open to your brand (target audiences, occasions, channels etc.). Then expose your rough idea to the different target audiences that it could have legs with and use their feedback to narrow down where the biggest (scale) and best (brand fit, route to market, feasibility) opportunity is for the brand now and in the future.

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About the Author

Shelly Greenway is a front-end innovation strategist and partner at The Strategy Distillery – a brand innovation consultancy that specializes in opportunity hunting and proposition development.

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Ron Kaufman

Is the customer always right?



Are customers always right?

Sometimes customers make mistakes, they get confused, they exaggerate, or even lie.

So, if the customer is wrong, what should you do?

You can still make the customer "feel right" by agreeing with them on the importance of what they value.

But there is a catch. The customer may not tell you what they value. In fact, they can even make it hard to know. You must work to find it.

For example, your customer says "Your service is so slow!"

But you investigate and discover that everything was done right on time. So, what do you do? Tell the customer they are wrong? Actually, you still make the customer "feel right"!

When they say your service is slow, you say "You are correct that speed is very important! Let me be the one to help you quickly..."

They say, "Your product is unreliable." You say, "You have a very good point, that reliable performance really matters." They say, "Your staff is rude." You say, "You always deserve our courtesy and respect."

They say, "You people are so bureaucratic." And you say, "Let's see just how flexible we can be for you."

They say, "Your price is too high." You step over to their side, and say, "You deserve great value for your money."

They say, "Your systems are hard to use." And you reply, "We are with you about the importance of user-friendly systems."

So, is the customer always right.

No.

Can you make a customer "feel right"? Yes.

How? By agreeing with them on importance of what they value. Remember, making your customer feel right keep things moving in the right direction, for you and your customers.

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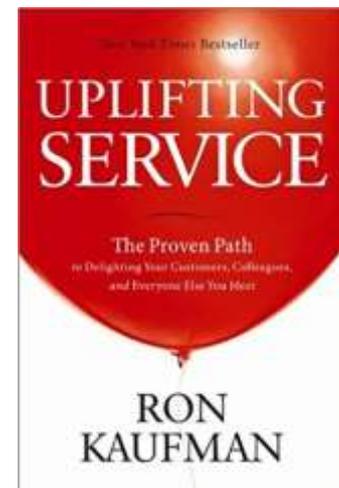
About the Author

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

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Kevin Stansfield

How to make your cash flow faster!



Each and every year, many businesses will fail. But, what is the reason that happens? Well, in most cases, it's purely and simply because they run out of cash. They can't pay their staff, their rent and their suppliers, and then they can longer function. Unfortunately, this doesn't just happen to "bad businesses."

Take for example the high profile bankruptcy of Lehman Brothers in 2008 – the biggest bankruptcy filing ever in the USA. This was one of the oldest and most successful investment banks in the world. It failed not because it ran out of clients or sales, but because it had insufficient assets to cover its liabilities – i.e. not enough cash to settle its debts. Ignoring this basic business principle brought down an organisation with \$600 billion in assets.

So, no matter how big or successful your business is, your cash flow is vital. You have probably heard the saying, "Turnover is vanity, profit is reality but cash is sanity." This is the reason why the first thing I look at with my clients is **how to improve their cash flow.**

Without the cash to pay your staff, buy stock and pay the rent on your premises, your business cannot function, no matter how fast sales are growing and how successful it may appear to be. Money is the lifeblood of a business; it needs to flow. If it

Cash Flow

Cash flow is the...
usually measured d...
information on a cc...
Cash flow can be...
determine proble...
... cash flow

stops flowing, then the business will suffer, and may even die.

What stops your cash flowing?

The business word for cash flow is **Liquidity** and it is defined as: **the ability to quickly turn assets into cash and pay liabilities when they become due.** To improve liquidity, you have to speed up the conversion of stock into sales, and debtors into cash, while keeping creditors to a minimum.

The biggest cash flow blockages for most businesses are:

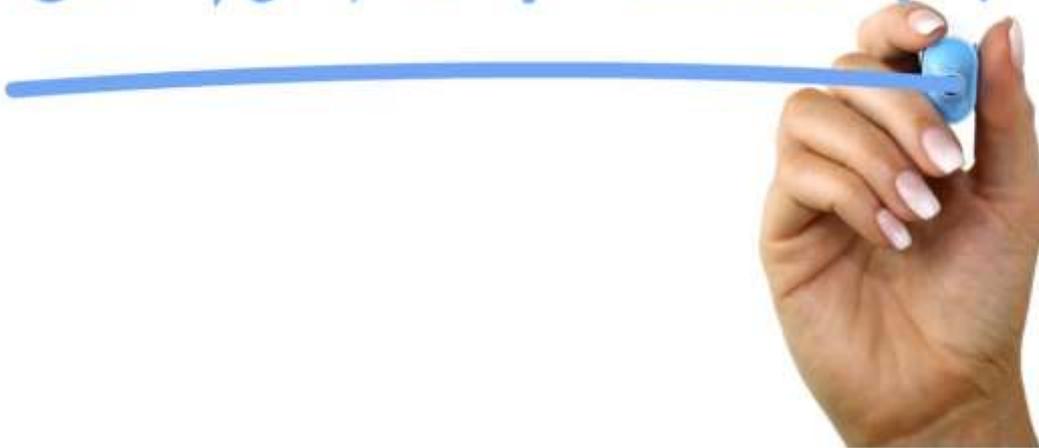
- A weak debt collection process;
- They are slow to convert stock into sales;
- Under utilisation of their assets (both people and equipment);
- Not generating enough sales to cover costs;
- Running up more debt to keep the business afloat.

How can you remove the blockages?

The first step to unblocking the flow of money and improving your liquidity is to **measure what you want to improve.** In his book "Keys to the Vault", international speaker and author Keith Cunningham states that **financial indicators are the score card of business.** If you do not know how to keep score, you can't play the game.

The quicker your game is being played, the more often you need to keep the score – so for example, a retailer will need to look at their financial indicators more frequently than a property developer. For some businesses, it is sufficient to check the key financial indicators on a monthly basis. For some, it may be a daily basis, but remember to avoid "paralysis by analysis" – chose the key indicators that are going to give you the information you need, and act on the information quickly when necessary.

CASH FLOW



Some key indicators are:

- **Liquidity ratio** – current assets / current liabilities
- **Debtor days** – average number of days your clients take to pay
- **Creditor days** – average number of days you take to pay your suppliers
- **Stock turnover** – average number of days you hold stock
- **Bank balance** – how much cash you have
- **Cash flow forecast** – projection of your daily/weekly cash flow requirements.

The best way to monitor these is to create a weekly dashboard with the figures that are most relevant to you. You would not fly a plane without looking at the dashboard regularly, so why would you try to run your business without doing the same?

How do you get your cash flowing faster?

Now you are measuring your cash flow regularly, how can you improve it even more? Some of the best and simplest strategies that I have used with clients are as follows:

- Request or increase up-front deposits from customers;

- Ensure work is finished quickly and dispatched on time;
- Invoice immediately, or on a more regular basis;
- Reduce your payment terms and charge interest to late payers;
- Have a debt collection policy and apply it rigorously;
- Review your overheads regularly;
- Improve staff efficiency by setting and reviewing performance targets regularly;
- Minimise stock holdings and order on a 'Just In Time' system;
- Ask suppliers for better payment terms or discounts;
- Realise old/slow moving stock and assets.

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About the Author

Kevin is the MD and founder of ActionCOACH Solent the leading business coaching and training firm in Southampton, Hampshire, where his team work with owner run businesses, helping them create better lives through Business Improvement and Growth.

Kevin has attained numerous Regional, European and Global awards. He is also a global speaker and trainer and has qualifications in areas as varied as an MBA, NLP, ECi and DISC. His life prior to coaching started as a Chartered Accountant which soon led to becoming a freelance FD of various fast growth companies. As a keen sportsman he believes whole heartedly that nobody achieves their full potential without appropriate training and coaching.

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Benjamin Ball

How to write so people will read – 6 great tips



These days, we are writing more than ever. That means it's harder than ever to grab attention. Your readers have more and more to get through – so you need to make it easy for them to read what you write. This is especially true in business. But how do you write so it's easier for people to read?

These six tips are some of the many ideas we apply in our business writing training programme.

Try them out today and you'll find it easier than ever to communicate clearly.

How to write #1 – Get to the point, quickly

If your memo asks for authorisation for new expenditure, say it in the first line. If your report tells the board there is nothing to worry about in the new regulation, say so in the first paragraph.

If your memo seeks approval for a new consumer test, say exactly that in the headline. Make it easy for the reader to know what you want them to do.

How to write #2 – Keep it short and simple

Great writing is easy to read. It uses simple structures and short phrases. Just by breaking long written sentences into shorter thought units, you can make your writing more accessible.

Some quick things to look for: make sure words that relate to each other are close together; get rid of jargon; cut unnecessary detail and break down complex sentences into constituent parts.

For example:

BEFORE: In reviewing the strategic impact of the Corporate ESG Assessment Report, the board considered many factors including environmental damage and pollution control, including the impact this had on our operations in south east Asia, South America and Africa and concluded that the current situation was satisfactory.

AFTER: After reviewing the Corporate ESG Assessment Report, the board concluded that our current ESG situation was satisfactory.

How to write #3 – Use the right verb

Your verbs power your sentences. They drive your thinking forward and direct the reader. When you select the right verb, you get to the heart of your sentence and to the heart of your meaning. Pick out strong verbs to hammer home what you want to say.

BEFORE: The new office has grown turnover quickly.

AFTER: Turnover in the new office has doubled in the last 6 months.

How to write #4 – Edit, ruthlessly

A large part of writing is re-writing. You should never be happy with your first draft. Look for redundant words, for needless repetition, for ideas not explained clearly enough. Check the order of your writing. Have you put the right things in the right order? Have you really made it easy for the reader? Is your start and your end strong enough? Keep editing until your writing is as good as it can be.



How to write #5 – Read it out loud

My penultimate tip is always read your writing out loud. When you read it, you'll spot logical errors, complex sentences and boring bits. And when you read out loud, you are more likely to uncover the beauty and rhythm in your words that make them easier to read.

How to write #6 – Read more journalism

Journalists are professional writers while most of us are just amateurs. Journalists get paid to capture attention, to explain what's going on and to get you back the next day for more of the same. When you read a newspaper, look how the writer structures sentences, produces paragraphs and shapes their articles. Copy their ideas and try their style. Find out which of their expert tools works best for you.

The more you read, the better you will write.

If you are interested in improving how you write, start by applying these six tips. But if you want to take it further, why not consider a **BBA coaching programme** in your company.

We organise intensive coaching days that help you look at your own writing in a different way. We help you pull apart bad writing and build it up again using best practice techniques.

You'll come away from a BBA training course very clear on what bad writing looks like – and how to create great writing. By the end, you'll be producing confident powerful written reports that are read and acted on.

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About the Author:

With a focus on improving financial presentations and increasing pitch win rates, Ben advises business leaders how to present themselves in front of investors, clients and the media.

Over the last 10 years he has built this company's systematic approach to pitch coaching and presentation training. He works with entrepreneurs, senior managers and leaders of major corporations. Clients he has advised include Permira, Statoil, Microsoft, Worldpay and Olswang as well as many private equity firms.

Previously Ben was a corporate financier at dot com specialist Durlacher following senior roles at Pearson, Cable and Wireless and the BBC. He is a regular speaker at financial conferences including Super Return and GAIM.

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Benjamin Ball
associates 
pitch | present | persuade





Yoram Solomon

Innovation leaders as white blood cells

One of the most important roles of the leader of a creative team is to keep the team separated from the rest of the organization. Just like your immune system separates you from disease.

What is the most important trait of the **creative team leader**? In my research of why people are **more creative** in start-up companies than in mature companies, I found that the **team leader played a very important role**, but not for the obvious reasons. It wasn't really his (or her) leadership skills. It wasn't how he (or she) inspired the team. It was something else, and in 2010 I got to experience it first-hand.

I worked as a Vice President and a General Manager of a very innovative product line in a public technology company. I had just finished my PhD dissertation, and knew that for a team to be creative, it needed less bureaucracy and processes, and more autonomy.

Just then, the company decided to adopt a time-keeping software called CrossPoint. It was going to let the company track how employees (specifically engineers) spent their time. It would give us statistics on their effectiveness on different tasks and allow "charging" their time to different projects, although all this meant was moving money from one pocket to the other and nothing more.

Needless to say, knowing that this is one more thing to **reduce employee creativity**, I objected. Vehemently, I might add. But it was futile. Doesn't matter what argument I brought up—there was a counter argument. Finally, the CEO got tired of arguing with me, and decided that we will implement CrossPoint and that's it!

I lost the war, but I thought I could still win one last battle, so I argued to exempt the employees on my team from that tool. "They only work on one project, so why does it matter that we track their time?" I asked. It didn't help either. My team was forced to use CrossPoint as well. I lost that one last battle too.

Once a month thereafter, the company's budget manager would come to our executive staff meetings and report on CrossPoint time allocation of all employees, by groups. Often he would complain that some of the employees didn't enter their time to the system in one group or another. As if they had nothing else (or better) to do...

One time, right after his report and complaints, he turned to me and said: "I don't get it. You were the one person who fought fearlessly against using CrossPoint. I would have expected that your team would be the worst in entering their time into the system. Yet, your team is the best in entering their time. How come? Did you change your mind about CrossPoint? How are you forcing your employees to do it on time?"

"Well," I said, "if you check carefully, you will notice that not only my employees enter their time promptly, but the entire team enters their time within the same 30 minutes..." He confirmed but seemed even more confused than before. "Let me save you the time," I added, "If you asked them how come they all entered their time into CrossPoint within the same half hour, I bet their answer will be: 'what's CrossPoint?'"

He then got it. My team never entered their time into the system. I did. I knew exactly what they all worked on, so I spent 30 minutes every week to enter their time, not bothering them with this extra step of process and bureaucracy.

And hence the role of a creative leader of a creative team: you have to operate like an immune system. You have to stop anything that can hurt employee creativity from entering the internal organs (your team). Stop time sheets and expense reports. Don't ask for weekly reports. If you don't know what your team is working on, then you are not really part of the team. If you are a true leader—you know exactly what everyone is working on without getting reports. Fill every bureaucratic form for them. Don't let them waste their time with the purchasing and procurement process. If they need something, and it is within the budget—you get it for them. If it's outside the budget—get the budget and then get it for them. If they have IT problems—you fill the IT ticket for them. As a leader, you only let three things into the team: funding, resources, and praise. Block everything else. Like a good immune system would.

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About the Author

Yoram can often be found speaking in different venues, from University Graduate business schools to Rotary Clubs, the Association for Strategic Planning National Conference, DEMO, and many more. He is an engaging speaker who was said to make people think afterwards. He is a professional member of the National Speakers Association.

Dr. Solomon published 7 books: "Un-Kill Creativity", "Blueprints for the Next Big Thing", "Bowling with a Crystal Ball (two editions)", "Business Plan through Investors' Eyes", "From Startup to Maturity," and "Worst Diet Ever." He authored numerous articles, many of them published at Inc. Magazine, Innovation Excellence, and his blog on this website.

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Rebecca L. Morgan

Your conscientiousness determines your success

Your level of conscientiousness has more effect on your life than you might have thought. It can determine many success factors, including your income, job satisfaction, health and even marital happiness.

If you have a high conscientiousness level and those around you don't, you're going to experience a lot of frustration. You will be continually faced with people who don't meet deadlines, honour their agreements, are inconsiderate of your and others' time, and have less commitment to quality output. I'm thinking it would be a helpful tool to ask potential employees (or mates!) to complete to know if you and they will be compatible.

The self-administered "Big Five" personality traits test assesses your conscientiousness level. It consists of fifty items you rate on how true they are about you on a five-point scale.

Conscientiousness is one of the "Big Five" – the others are agreeableness, extroversion, emotional stability (also called neuroticism), and intellect/imagination (also known as openness to experience). Each is important to one's success, but there's a tremendous amount of research linking conscientiousness with success in school and jobs – even higher income and job satisfaction.

University of Pennsylvania psychologist Angela Duckworth found conscientiousness traits to

be more integral to children's scholarly success than IQ.

- Those who test high in conscientiousness are shown to:
 - get better grades in school and college
 - commit fewer crimes
 - stay married longer
 - have more self-control and stick-to-itiveness
 - live longer
- They tend to have:
 - high levels of thoughtfulness
 - good impulse control
 - goal-directed behaviours
 - organizational skills
 - consideration for others
- They tend to:
 - spend time preparing
 - finish important tasks right away
 - pay attention to details
 - enjoy having a set schedule
 - be punctual
- Each of the Big Five characteristics has six sub-traits. For conscientiousness these are:
 - self-efficacy (ability to accomplish tasks)
 - orderliness (ability to organize)
 - dutifulness (sense of duty and obligation)
 - achievement-striving (commitment to achieving excellence)
 - self-discipline (level of willpower)
 - cautiousness (ability to think through possibilities before acting)

If you are not naturally conscientiousness you can learn to establish the habits to raise your conscientiousness. For example, if you are often late, you can learn to set an alarm on your

phone or watch that alerts you of when to leave. If you tend to put off tasks, schedule them on your calendar so you're less likely to forget. Enlist the ideas of a highly conscientious person to share their thinking and tools for you to adopt.

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About the Author

Rebecca L. Morgan, CSP, CMC, specialises in creating innovative solutions for workplace effectiveness challenges. She's appeared on 60 Minutes, Oprah, the Wall Street Journal, National Public Radio and USA Today. Rebecca is the bestselling author of 25 books, including "Calming Upset Customers" and "Professional Selling." She is an exemplary resource who partners with you to accomplish high ROI on your key-talent development projects.

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Drayton Bird

A simple thought

Before writing this Helpful Idea, I want to revisit one I sent you previously.

It was about the importance of the word "you".

I felt almost apologetic when writing it, as you would think any good marketer knows you must talk about the customers' interests, not your own.

But to be honest I don't feel too apologetic now, because recently I went through a selection of the websites run by the firms readers of this series work for.

The overwhelming majority focus on the company, not the customer.

They almost all base their approach on that deadening phrase "About us" and the content of most welcome pages is inward-looking and boastful "We are the leading, etc" stuff.

Now, I realise this may not even be your area, that it makes the people who run it feel good, and it's often suggested by website designers who know less than the square root of ****-all about marketing ...

... And I realise people want to be reassured that they're dealing with a good firm - but only after they've been sold on the benefits you offer.

Just think how most people come across your website. Nowadays it's the first place they go after you've attracted their interest - when they're

wondering whether they want to go any further.

Here's a good way to look at it. When you go to a site, it's as though you've just walked into a store. You look for a helpful sales person.

How would you react if you said, "I'm looking for a widget" and got this reply:

"We're wonderful. We're the best store in Oxford Street. Would you like to read our mission statement? The board loves it. Would you like to meet our management team? Like to read their biographies? See their pictures? How about the chairman's report?"

Crazy, really?

Well, I'm sorry, but that's what many of you are doing. If your firm has money to burn, please send it to me and I'll turn it into profit for you.

But to be serious, this leads me to today's Helpful Idea:

Try to find a real-life comparison with what you're doing.

Don't look at marketing as divorced from the real world - which is all too easy to do if you spend a lot of time sitting in meetings talking about strategy. Try to imagine an analogy with real life, just as I did a few moments ago.

To make this clearer, here's another two examples.

Suppose people do you a favour in real life. What do you do? You say "thank you".

That's why thank-you letters - which I mentioned in a previous note to you - make such sense.

Or suppose you throw a party in real life. What would you like to

know? You'd like to know if people enjoyed it. That's why questionnaires after events make sense.

Like so many other things in life, marketing is simple - if you allow it to be.

Best,

Drayton

P.S. Don't forget - if you have a friend or colleague who you think would like to hear from me, please forward me their address. They'll get a polite invitation - which they can decline - and I never share my email lists.

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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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Rus Slater

Planning the improvement



When you have finished all the mapping and analysis, you can actually start planning the improvement to the process.

Before you plunge too deeply into this, it is wise to understand, and ensure everyone else does too, what you are hoping to achieve:

- Are you expressly looking for measurable improvements in specific areas? For example, are you aiming to speed up cycle time, reduce headcount, lower costs or cut your carbon footprint? If so, by how much?
- Are you simply checking to make sure that your process is as efficient as it can be?
- Are you hoping to find ways to help your staff achieve more in the same period of time?
- Are you actually just adding 'improvement' on to the mapping that you are doing in order to generate the documentation needed for a quality system?
- Are you looking to improve capability in order to take on new work and increase profitability/stability (rather than be able to reduce headcount)?

It is valuable to ensure that the same

ACTION

Get the people who actually 'do' the process to map it and improve it. Keep the same team for both jobs and **never use consultants to improve the process!**

people who did all the work to date are just as heavily involved in the improvement, because they know the processes and they have done all the analysis. They are therefore better able to see the reasons for keeping certain events in the process. Also, they are the people who will make the new process work, so you want them to have both ownership and responsibility for the new processes actually functioning or you may immediately go into a situation where you have a separate 'as is' and 'should be'!

Case study

In 2008 Alaska Airlines undertook a process improvement exercise on their check-in kiosks. They

- Brought together a team of check-in staff
- Agreed a prioritised list of improvements
- Gave them the time and resources for brainstorming, mapping and experimentation
- Encouraged other employees in the process to share their thoughts
- Finally, tested their recommended improvements, allowed them to make adjustments and then roll out their solution.

The results speak for themselves: During a typical two-hour period, an Alaska agent checked-in 46 customers; in the same time, the agent at another airline's nearby check-in counter – one with a traditional process – served just 22.

The new design not only improves customer service, cutting check-in time from 25+ minutes to an average of just eight; it also has the potential to save the company an estimated \$8 million in annual overhead.

Never use consultants to improve the process as people often resent being told how to do their job by consultants who have never done it. Consequently, they don't take any ownership of the 'improvement'. The consultants aren't going to be around to pick up the pieces if their 'improvements' don't work, consequently they don't take ownership of the improvements either!

Consultants seldom understand why things need to be done a certain way or understand the downstream impact of changes. So never use consultants to improve the process... you can use a consultant as a facilitator to help your own people with the improvement but let them be the captains of the ship whilst the consultant simply keeps the boiler stoked!

Process users

Some people are good at following processes and get a bit lost without them – without knowing what happens next. They are good at testing processes. They are more procedural in their approach to doing things and tend to keep using a process once they find one that works for them. They will seldom experiment to find new ways or

improvements. They can be creatures of habit.

However...

Process 'improvers'

Some people are forever tweaking processes to see if things can be done differently. They often dislike being required to follow a process and gravitate towards things where they have options to choose from. They are good at designing new processes, but not so good at following or testing existing ones, as they will always want to do things a bit differently. They will get bored by being constrained within a process and seek to 'spice it up' or change it for the sake of change, not necessarily for the sake of improvement.

So, your challenge as a manager is to get the two types of people to work together to produce a really good process that everyone can support!

Start with 'as is'

It is best to start with your 'as is' process laid out graphically in front of the team, with all the 'data' from the analysis.

- Look at the overall process and ask yourself the question, 'Is it OK?' It may be that the answer is either 'yes' or 'pretty much, with a few tweaks'. If the answer was a yes, then – depending on your overall objective – you may want to **leave it alone** (if it ain't broke don't fix it). Many managers have dug themselves into a hole by trying to change things for the sake of it
- If the answer was 'pretty much, with a few tweaks', follow the same change process as if you were undertaking significant changes. A carelessly done small change can wreak havoc.

- If there are major areas that need to be changed, you may want to start off with the question 'Is it worth **us** changing the process or should we just outsource it? If you decide to outsource it, have a look at your Customer Service Agreement, remembering that you are now the customer!
- If you are going to undertake improvements to the process, follow **this change process**.
- Consider small and radical changes to events within the process and ways in which an activity can be improved slightly, such as improved timing, material or method. Also consider ways in which the activity can be removed altogether or reduced dramatically.

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About the Author

Rus is a professional learning and development specialist and business coach. With over 15 years' experience as a line manager, associate and independent consultant he can bring performance improvement to most individuals and teams in most situations and sectors.

Rus has two overarching principles in terms of his work with clients:

- it must add value to the organisation and the lives/careers of the individuals involved
- it must be pragmatic, enjoyable and memorable

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Finish with Humour



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