

Better Business Focus

May 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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Drayton Bird

Before you read this, grab a coffee and sit down...

It's about your most powerful weapon. But it's not short.

If you were the first to discover gunpowder - wouldn't you make the most of it?

When your enemy is using bows and arrows and you've got a cannon, wouldn't you have a huge advantage?

And once everyone else got gunpowder wouldn't you be sure to have the best cannon available?

Why am I asking such a strange question?

Well, the reason is simple.

E-mail now is like what gunpowder was in the 14th century. We all use it; and all reports say it's your most powerful weapon.

So why are so many e-mails so pathetically bad?

Here I comment on some e-mails I received the other day.

I also cover the essential principles behind messages that persuade. I hope what I say helps you.

First let me tell you about one of the most important decisions I ever made in my life.

It was the decision to sell my agency to Ogilvy & Mather rather than any of the other agencies wanting to buy us.

It was not just because David Ogilvy was famous. It was because his worldwide Creative Director was a man I already knew – Norman Berry.

Norman was an inspiration behind two factors that led me to admire Ogilvy & Mather - *Better Creative* and *Better Training*.

He had a presentation he did countless times. I don't know that he ever did any other.

It was called "Good Ad, Bad Ad" - a simple demonstration of why ads work and why they don't.

The plain fact is that if you don't know the difference between what works and what doesn't, you will fail.

A brilliant product can succeed without good marketing - but the majority of us have to rely on doing better selling.

If you are interested in what works and what doesn't I wrote a book 16 years ago called "How to Write a Sales Letter That Sells"

The book did fairly well and I thought it was good - one of the world's best copywriters, Bob Bly, said it was the best he'd ever read.

But I was distressed when all of a sudden e-mail arrived and I thought my book was going to be out of date.

Luckily, I realised that the principles in all media are always the same.

Are you promising something people desperately want and can get easily?

Are you promising they can escape something they fear? And do so easily?

Or are you saying something that inspires so much relevant curiosity that people can't resist it?

If you manage to combine two or more of these in your heading you're on to a winner.

A good example is a headline written by a man I knew: "*The Lazy Man's Way to Get Rich*"

It promises benefit, it promises you'll get that benefit without doing something you don't like - work - and it inspires curiosity.

Exactly the same things apply to emails.

The reassuring (but little known) truth about your emails

Do you think that every time a new medium - a way to communicate - arrives everything changes?

Let me reassure you. Human nature doesn't change - so no matter how you reach people what works doesn't change.

Your colleagues and maybe you may have got into a fluster because of Social Media. I know of no unsocial media – society is always involved - but that's another subject

Relax. Sit back. Everything you know about e-mails or advertising copy or direct mail or telephone scripts applies in social media.

To give an example, today I someone emailed asking me if I'd like to have a presentation. Many people write asking if I'd like to talk on the phone to them or a "member of my team."

I cannot recall one who explained clearly what benefit I would derive. Usually I don't answer – but if I did I'd say "no". I'm bloody busy.

They never say clearly what's in it for me.

Some actively put me off.

A few minutes ago, I clicked to see what their presentation was about. There was a picture of fingers on a computer, a sheet of paper with charts on it, a post-it note and somebody scribbling on a pad.

What could be more depressing? Well, actually, the copy under the picture.

"Why Data Analytics is the best decision for businesses"

Guess what? That filled me with gloom.

If you can't find some way to attract people's attention and get them interested in a human, emotional way you're dead in the water.

Email, direct mail, posters, any damn thing you're trying. It's always true.

Do these sound familiar?

Every day you and I get emails that are good, bad, ugly and sometimes downright appalling.

Not too many are appalling. For those just read the messages written by machines somewhere in Russia I assume promising sexual delights beyond your wildest dreams, or how you can get rich without any work.

Here's an example

From: Elaine W.
Date: 18 March 2018 at 15:40:27 GMT
To: <drayton@draytonbird.com>
Subject: If you love money, they are here
 It is difficult to earn; it is already busy everywhere.
 There is the single place where everything is honest, [click and earn](#)

I cannot begin to imagine who might reply to something like that, although there are two words here that always attract people's attention: Love and Money.

Don't dismiss these emails entirely, though. There's always some idiots willing to believe in the impossible out there.

Now let's look at to the lowest level of crass incompetence in normal English. That's saying what you do without giving any reason why anyone would want it.

It's an e-mail with the heading "Music production house"

No hint as to why – or even if - this house is better than other houses, or any other kind of help.

Unless you are desperate for a production house right then you are not going to open that e-mail. It's what I call Confetti Marketing. Throw it up and see if it lands on the right person.

But even if you do open it, look how it begins.

From: Rotem Hecht
Date: 18 March 2018 at 18:42:37 GMT
To:
Subject: Music production house
Reply-To:
 Hi
 my name is Rotem Hecht. I'm the owner of RH Music, a music production house. I score and produce music (and sound design) for TV commercials, films, video games, TV series and more worldwide.

My portfolio includes projects for Lego, Disney, Microsoft, Hershey's, Kre-O, Hasbro, Mercedes, Audi, Nickelodeon, Hop! TV Channel and more

I'm capable of delivering high quality products in short period of time and very flexible with the price.

I would like to offer you my services. Please check my portfolio on my website.

You and I know nobody except him gives a toss about this man and his production house. He should talk about his offering.

If he offers something special he must say what it is very quickly. But he doesn't and he hasn't. He talks about himself, like a bore in a bar.

Here's another one.

From: Roger Young
Date: 18 March 2018 at 10:43:56 GMT
To:
Subject: need help for your business?
Reply-To:

We want to help you to grow your business fast.

We provide you email ad service. Our services can find you new customers and generate business leads.

Let's help your business reach the next level. Our packages are designed according to your requirements.

If you would require more information please reply back and we would be glad to discuss the project requirements with you.

Please contact us so I can go over options for you.

Thanks,
 Roger Young

At least this suggests some help - better than nothing. But it's hard to get much vaguer. You're not going to read even the first line.

Here's something from John Lewis – a very successful firm whose profits have slumped by 70%. No wonder.

From: John Lewis <johnlewis@eml.johnlewis.com>
Date: 18 March 2018 at 09:24:01 GMT
To: <drayton@draytonbird.com>
Subject: Prop the home for Easter
Reply-To: John Lewis Online <reply-fec7157171620d7e-16_HTML-5147118-6284864-2641@eml.johnlewis.com>

Plus, this Easter we'll have activities in store [View email in browser](#). To receive our emails to your inbox add JohnLewis@eml.johnlewis.com



I don't think it gets anyone salivating: spectacularly boring. They might as well say "Come and visit our shop tomorrow".

Of course, pointing out that most of these things are rubbish is easy - but doesn't help you.

This is not quite so bad – but it makes some crass mistakes.

From: John [redacted]
 Date: 18 March 2018 at 13:26:34 GMT
 To: Drayton@draytonbird.com
 Subject: Good internet lead better than

I have many friends who consider me one of their closest pals... who do not get along with other friends who also consider me a close pal. This is because my worldview has never penalized anyone for being odd, or a different age, or of a different political/religious/ethnic belief system.

I like character, intelligence (not IQ, but raw savvy) and a strong sense of humor and yearning for adventure – everything else is irrelevant.

So when I started studying salesmanship, I realized I was already steeped and self-trained in one of the more critical parts – the deep empathy that comes from walking a mile in the other guy's shoes, and the refusal to allow ideology to trump common bonds.

This is pretty rare, folks. I mastered this by accident... because as a totally introverted, colorblind, working-class kid who felt isolated from the bulk of society, I experienced a bond with other outsiders. Those of you who paid attention in high school should know, by now, that the kids who became successful adults almost never were popular or comfortable in their teens.

My first advice to entrepreneurs is often to "Get out of Dodge" – go for a trip away from your Comfort Zone, where you're constantly challenged on your beliefs, and your conceits of being competent (or, worse, "brilliant").

Another country is good.

But also simply leaving your Echo Chambers of political/financial/social thought patterns can do the trick.

Never try and sell three things at once. Either sell one thing with an upgrade or lots of this, like a catalogue. And never run e-mails that look like posters. They should look like a personal email.

The same principles apply in direct mail. Always send letters that look personal, not like leaflets through the post.

Here's another which is better.

This is from a very famous copywriter who misses no opportunity to tell people he's a genius; but it's not as good as it should be.



If he had put the word "Why" in front of that heading he would get a better response. People would want to know the answer.

But guess what? The best e-mail I saw on the day I reviewed some of the e-mails sent to me was headed.

"The 7 Places you'll hate to take your kids this weekend."



It inspired curiosity, it was very personal, it made me smile and I read the whole thing, even though they weren't selling me a thing.

If you want better copy look at what people who AREN'T selling anything except stuff to make you. Successful media and magazines. They have to get people to read or they go broke.

And the same applies to you.

There's a very good book called "Nobody wants to read your shit."

Remember that before you send out another email – or anything else.

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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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Bob Apollo

When demographics aren't enough: Identifying your ideal customers



Companies (and individual sales people) can and often do waste an awful amount of time, money and energy pursuing organisations that are never likely to buy - or, if they were to, are never likely to buy from your organisation.

Many marketers have jumped on the bandwagon of buyer personas over the past few years, but these are typically targeted at individual roles, and have served to conceal a potentially more important truth: companies have personas, too...

These personas are more important, and more complex, than a simple demographic segmentation based around company size, sector, location or function. Whilst demographics can provide an important foundation, in complex B2B sales environments there are many other factors that serve to define what an ideal customer looks like.

So, what do we mean when we talk about an "Ideal Customer"? It's an organisation that is likely to:

- Suffer from critical issues that you are really good at solving
- Be in the market now or in the future for your category of solution
- Be prepared to buy from an organisation like yours
- Turn into a good and profitable customer

- Evolve into a long-term strategic relationship

It should be obvious - as you reflect on your most attractive existing customers - that the common characteristics that unify these archetypal ideal customers go far beyond basic demographics.

For the tech-based businesses that I typically work with, there are usually three important additional ways of characterising these ideal customers: technographic, firmographic and situational. Let's consider each of these in turn:

TECHNOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

For any tech-based business, the technologies that have already been adopted by the prospective customer are incredibly powerful indicators. For example, in the early days of SaaS solutions, it was very useful to know whether the organisation had already implemented any other SaaS based applications.

For many early-stage or scale-up vendors, it's also important to know whether the prospect has a track record of acquiring similarly innovative best-of-breed solutions in other areas of the business, or whether they typically default to buying from an established vendor even if their solution turns out to be less advanced. This can help avoid investing large amounts of effort in an opportunity where

you get selected as the "best" solution but then get rejected when it comes to final approval.

Of course, you may be selling technology that works best or is most easily integrated with certain other systems, but knowing what existing technology is in use can also be a useful proxy for the stage of development of the prospective customer - different platforms tend to be associated with start-up, scale-up and mature IT environments.

FIRMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Perhaps the most obvious aspect of organisational personas is what I'll refer to as "firmographic" characteristics. For example, do your most attractive customers tend to be:

- Start-up, scale-up or mature organisations?
- Market leaders, challenger brands, or one of many players?
- Early adopters, innovators, in the mainstream or laggards?
- Seen as reference points for other companies in their sector?
- Centralised or decentralised decision-makers?
- Focused on new business or their on existing customers?
- Primarily B2B or B2C focused?

You'll almost certainly - if you analyse your existing customer base hard enough - find other common characteristics. There will probably be just a handful that turn out to be particularly important indicators.

SITUATIONAL CHARACTERISTICS

Demographic, technographic and firmographic characteristics can help to establish who your most attractive long-term prospects are - but it's their situational characteristics that indicate whether they could be ready to implement your solution today.

Situational characteristics are associated with recent changes in your potential customer's internal or external environment. These changes act as trigger events - they help the organisation to recognise that their current environment may not enable them to master their current and future challenges and spark the recognition that it could be time to take action.

Common trigger events include:

- A change in senior management
- A new round of investment
- A merger or acquisition
- A new corporate initiative
- Launching a new product or entering a new market
- Accelerated headcount growth or staff turnover
- The introduction of new regulation or legislation
- Changes in the competitive environment

Once again, if you carefully analyse your recent wins and losses and survey your most attractive existing customers, you'll inevitably uncover some patterns that can help identify when a prospective customer might be ripe for change.

INVEST IN YOUR OWN RESEARCH!

Whilst these indicators are incredibly valuable, they typically can't be established simply by buying-in basic demographically organised databases or mailing lists. You can identify some of these factors through some of the better business intelligence services. But at the end of the day, there is no substitute for knowing what you are looking for and doing your own research.

PUTTING THE PROFILES TO USE

Creating your ideal customer profiles needs to be a collaborative effort between sales and marketing. It's critically important that everyone agrees what sort of organisations your company should be targeting. Once you have that common understanding:

- Marketing can more effectively target their thought leadership, database building and pipeline building efforts
- Sales can more effectively qualify the right opportunities early on in the sales cycle, and implement the appropriate sales strategies
- Everyone can spend their time, money and resources more effectively
- You will see a direct positive impact on true pipeline value, sales cycle length, average deal value and sales win rates

What's not to like? By the way, I think you'll also appreciate this [guide to value selling](#).

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About the Author

Bob Apollo is a Fellow of the [Association of Professional Sales](#) and the Founder of UK-based [Inflexion-Point Strategy Partners](#), home of the [Value Selling System®](#). Following a successful career spanning start-ups, scale-ups and mature corporates, Bob now works with a growing client base of tech-based growth-phase businesses, equipping and enabling them to systematically create and capture mutually meaningful value in every customer interaction.

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Drayton Bird

Don't be vague

Today I thought I'd give you a bit of culture, in fact two cultures.



The man above is William Blake, the wonderful poet and painter, who once said, "To Generalize is to be an Idiot; To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit."

What he was saying in his typical vehement way, was be precise.

And to give a demonstration of what he meant, applied to marketing, let us travel half way across the world, to India.

Wanted. A Brahmin bridegroom for girl under 23

This is a story told to me 21 years ago by the Managing Director of O&M Direct in India, R. Sridhar.

When we met I asked him how he got married to his wife Vijay. Did arranged marriages still exist in India? Or was it a love match?

He said that it was an arranged marriage and 70% of marriages were still arranged.

Then he told this story.

Sridhar had written an article in "Business India" on Direct Marketing - hoping to get some more business.

The next day an elderly, distinguished person arrived at his door with his wife.

Sridhar noticed he carried a copy of "Business India" and was most interested.

He invited the man in and said: "Can I help you?" And this is how the conversation went.

"I have a daughter who is ready to get married. And last week I placed a matrimonial ad in the papers. I am very disappointed with the response."

It's very common in India to advertise for your bride. That's precisely how Sridhar found his own wife.

The man continued: "Then I saw this article. You seem to have done something for a restaurant, a blood bank and some computer. I wonder if you could raise responses for a matrimonial ad."

He then gave Sridhar a fifteen minute lecture on how difficult it was to get girls married - and why as a last resort he had thought of advertising.

Sridhar asked for a copy of the advertisement.

It said:

Wanted: Brahmin bridegroom, for a well accomplished South Indian girl under 23. Reply Box No.

Sridhar: "You said the response is poor."

"Of course it is bloody poor. I got three replies. One is from a widower. One is from a Kashmiri Brahmin. The third is from a boy who is just 23. Too young."

"Look, my daughter is a MSc. first class. This chap should at least have a good degree. Of course he must have a good job. And he must be the right age. She is 23."

So they wrote the ad again: *Wanted: a well educated, well employed bridegroom around 27 for a 23 year old South Indian Brahmin MSc. Reply ...*

This was rejected by the man's wife because it didn't say anything about horoscopes, which are considered important in India.

Also, it didn't clarify whether they were looking for an Iyer or an Iyengar bridegroom - these are two particular types of Brahmin. The girl was fairly slim and very fair. The more traditional Indians are very concerned about whether people are fair or dark (a common concern in many cultures, for those of you who are politically correct.)

So, they had to take account of this and also the fact that the girl was a very good Carnatic Music Singer. Thus, the son-in-law must appreciate music.

The girl was also an officer in the State bank with a good salary. And she was the only daughter of a well to do industrialist. On the other hand, she didn't mind settling abroad.

So they rewrote it again:
"Wanted: a well educated, well employed, lyengar bridegroom around 27, for a 23 year old, 5'6" very fair, slim, South Indian Brahmin MSc. Bank Officer. Well accomplished Carnatic singer. Only daughter of a successful industrialist. Girl willing to settle abroad. Reply with horoscope..."

They showed the wife the draft again. By this time Sridhar was hoping it would go through.

But she was a difficult client. She rejected it again. It didn't say anything about lineage. So there had to be another qualification - non-Bharadwaja - which means nothing to me but meant a lot to them. This is how the ad then read:

"Wanted: a well educated, well employed non-Bharadwaja lyengar bridegroom around 27, for a 23 year old South India very fair, slim, 5'6" MSc Bank Officer. Well accomplished Carnatic singer. Only daughter of a successful industrialist. Girl is willing to settle abroad. Reply with horoscope..."

Then the lady turned the question of media placement.

"Where did you place your last ad?"

"Times of India in Bombay," said the husband.

"Quite wrong" said the lady. "You should have gone into the Hindu. Even in Bombay, the type we are looking for will buy the Hindu every Sunday only for the matrimonial ads. Make sure you release it on a Sunday."

So, the media schedule was settled. But what about the timing?

"We can get it in next Sunday", Sridhar said.

"No, no", said the lady. "This is the month of ashada. Nobody ever contemplates marriage this month. So, you wouldn't get any replies.

And another thing. Do you think you could get a Madras Box Number? Because I think you will get better replies."

"How much would it cost?" asked her husband.

"About Rs. 390," said Sridhar

"My God. If I only got three replies, each reply would cost me Rs. 130."

His wife said "So what? Why are you bothered about numbers? If you get one worthwhile alliance, won't that be enough?"

A few weeks later the gentleman called Sridhar and said:
"You know that ad you did for us. We released it in the Hindu two weeks ago and got nearly 40 replies. There are at least seven worthwhile. Thanks a lot."

Sridhar confessed to having squirmed when he accepted this compliment. He realised his clients had contributed most. They'd taught him quite a lesson about targeting and creative.

I find this story interesting for three reasons.

First, it demonstrates that no matter what country you are in, your clients can often teach you a lesson.

Second, it shows that the more precise your copy is the better you will do - and that usually means making it longer.

And third, that the quality of the reply often matters more than the cost.

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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Paul Sloane

Eight tips for better conversations

You probably know some people who are unremittingly dull company. You may be fortunate enough to know some brilliant conversationalists who can enliven any discussion. In which category would other people place you? How can you improve your conversational skills to become a welcome sight at every social event? Here are some tips.

Ask Questions

Most people like to talk about themselves so asking questions is a great way to start conversations. If you meet someone for the first time, start by asking simple, non-threatening questions about them, what they do, where they live etc. If you know someone moderately well then you should be aware of some of their interests so simple questions about those are good ways to start.

In groups similar considerations apply. You should generally start new conversations by throwing out questions rather than making statements or talking about things you have done. By asking questions you draw other people in and engage them.

Listen

Great conversationalists are great listeners. Whether you are with one person or a group listen attentively. People like good listeners – wouldn't you rather speak with someone who was interested in what you had to say rather than someone who looked bored and indifferent? Also, when you listen you learn. When you are speaking you are not learning

anything new. Make a conscious effort to focus on what people say. Show that you are interested by asking questions that support and develop the conversation; 'What do you mean exactly?', 'What happened next?', 'How did you feel about that?'

Give Compliments

Pay compliments whenever you sincerely can. If someone looks smart or has lost weight or has a stylish new haircut then show that you have noticed by giving a genuine compliment. 'That colour really suits you.' 'You are looking very trim today.' If they tell you about some achievement – say at work or by one of their children then congratulate them. As a matter of general courtesy, you should always thank and compliment your host.

Use Names

People like to hear their own names. When you meet someone for the first time and learn their name, try to use it. 'So John, where do you live?' Using the name helps you to remember it. It also shows that you are interested in them. Mentioning a person by name is a subtle compliment.

Keep up to date on topical issues

It is important to keep abreast of key current issues and topics in the news, entertainment, sports and politics. You should be ready to comment with questions, ideas, facts and opinions on the issues that other people are interested in. So, see a few of the latest movies, read some of the most popular fiction and non-fiction, read the newspapers, watch the news, keep up with some major sports stories and watch some TV – but not too much.

When discussing serious topics be prepared to oppose the conventional view and to take a rather provocative stance – even for the sake of doing so. This will lead to a more interesting conversation than if you just agree with what is said. For example, if everyone is against some political leader, then come to their defense.

If you want to introduce a contentious comment you can distance yourself from it by asking, 'How would you answer someone who argued that.....?' Make your points with conviction, evidence and, if possible, humour. But in a social environment be careful not to become belligerent or cantankerous. In general it is best to avoid really sensitive or controversial topics.

Be Humorous

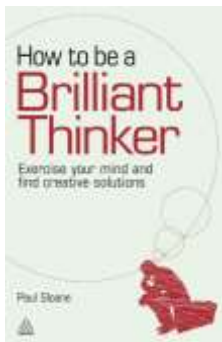
There is a place for serious discussion and there is a place for the light-hearted, so be ready to contribute in either environment. Witty comments tend to be spontaneous, clever and unexpected so being witty is not an easy skill to develop but there are some things you can do. Have a stock of funny stories. Do not force them into the conversation but have them ready when you get the cue or when there is a lull. Personal anecdotes relating to unusual experiences and misfortunes that befell you often go down well. Jokes, quotes and other people's witty remarks can also be used sparingly and with acknowledgement. But beware of smutty or offensive stories. Laugh at other people's funny stories, even if you have heard them before; never give away someone else's punch line.

Speak Clearly

Say what you have to say with clarity, enthusiasm and brevity. Many people mumble their words, or rush through them or whisper so quietly that you have to strain to hear them. Good conversationalists are clear, articulate and easy to understand. They use interesting metaphors and visual images. Keep your sentences short and to the point. If there is a pause then draw someone in with a question.

Enjoy it

Be yourself, be natural and don't try to be anything that you are not. Approach the situation with a positive attitude and tell yourself that you are going to have a good time and meet some interesting people. Relax, smile and enjoy the occasion. People prefer to mix with the happy and good-natured rather than the grumpy and miserable.



Taken from *How to be a Brilliant Thinker* by Paul Sloane

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About the Author

Paul was part of the team which launched the IBM PC in the UK in 1981. He became MD of database company Ashton-Tate. In 1993 Paul joined MathSoft, publishers of mathematical software as VP International. He became CEO of Monactive, a British software company which publishes software asset management tools. In 2002 he founded his own company, Destination Innovation, which helps organisations improve innovation. He writes and speaks on lateral thinking and innovation. His latest book is *The Leader's Guide to Lateral Thinking Skills* published by Kogan-Page.

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Sunil Bali

A successful life requires 3 things...



A successful life requires 3 things. They are a:

- **Wish bone** – You can't hit a target you can't see. Having a clear vision of what you wish for keeps you on the right path.
- **Back bone** – to keep going when you're going through hell, and a
- **Funny bone** – laughter is the shortest distance between two people, and given that great relationships drive business and life, putting a smile on people's faces is both an enjoyable and profitable strategy.

Regardless, don't you find that people with a good sense of humour have a better sense of life?

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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

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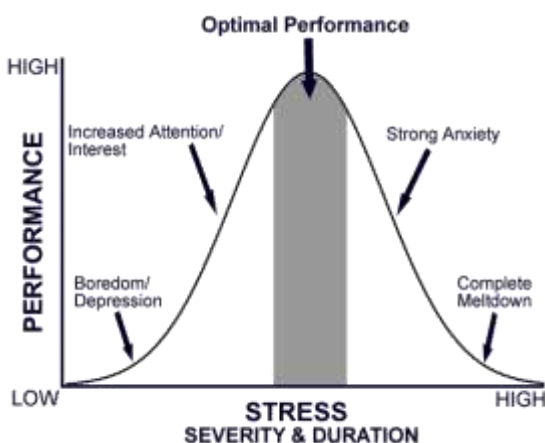


Travis Bradberry

How successful people stay calm

The ability to manage your emotions and remain calm under pressure has a direct link to your performance. TalentSmart has conducted research with more than a million people, and we've found that 90% of top performers are skilled at managing their emotions in times of stress in order to remain calm and in control.

If you follow our newsletter, you've read some startling research summaries that explore the havoc stress can wreak on one's physical and mental health (such as the [Yale study](#), which found that prolonged stress causes degeneration in the area of the brain responsible for self-control). The tricky thing about stress (and the anxiety that comes with it) is that it's an absolutely necessary emotion. Our brains are wired such that it's difficult to take action until we feel at least some level of this emotional state. In fact, performance peaks under the heightened activation that comes with moderate levels of stress. As long as the stress isn't prolonged, it's harmless.



New research from the University of California, Berkeley, reveals an upside to experiencing moderate levels of stress. But it also reinforces how important it is to keep stress under control. The study, led by post-doctoral fellow Elizabeth Kirby, found that the onset of stress entices the brain into growing new cells responsible for improved memory. However, this effect is only seen when stress is intermittent. As soon as the stress continues beyond a few moments into a prolonged state, it suppresses the brain's ability to develop new cells.

"I think intermittent stressful events are probably what keeps the brain more alert, and you perform better when you are alert," Kirby says. For animals, intermittent stress is the bulk of what they experience, in the form of physical threats in their immediate environment. Long ago, this was also the case for humans. As the human brain evolved and increased in complexity, we've developed the ability to worry and persevere on events, which creates frequent experiences of prolonged stress.

Besides increasing your risk of heart disease, depression, and obesity, stress decreases your cognitive performance. Fortunately, though, unless a lion is chasing you, the bulk of your stress is subjective and under your control. Top performers have well-honed coping strategies that they employ under stressful circumstances. This lowers their stress levels regardless of what's happening in their environment, ensuring that the stress they experience is intermittent and not prolonged.

While I've run across numerous effective strategies that successful people employ when faced with stress, what follows are ten of the best. Some of these strategies may seem obvious, but the real challenge lies in recognizing when you need to use them and having the wherewithal to actually do so in spite of your stress.

They Appreciate What They Have

Taking time to contemplate what you're grateful for isn't merely the "right" thing to do. It also improves your mood, because it reduces the stress hormone cortisol by 23%. Research conducted at the University of California, Davis found that people who worked daily to cultivate an attitude of gratitude experienced improved mood, energy, and physical well-being. It's likely that lower levels of cortisol played a major role in this.

They Avoid Asking "What If?"

"What if?" statements throw fuel on the fire of stress and worry. Things can go in a million different directions, and the more time you spend worrying about the possibilities, the less time you'll spend focusing on taking action that will calm you down and keep your stress under control. Calm people know that asking "what if?" will only take them to a place they don't want—or need—to go.

They Stay Positive

Positive thoughts help make stress intermittent by focusing your brain's attention onto something that is completely stress-free. You have to give your wandering brain

a little help by consciously selecting something positive to think about. Any positive thought will do to refocus your attention. When things are going well, and your mood is good, this is relatively easy. When things are going poorly, and your mind is flooded with negative thoughts, this can be a challenge. In these moments, think about your day and identify one positive thing that happened, no matter how small. If you can't think of something from the current day, reflect on the previous day or even the previous week. Or perhaps you're looking forward to an exciting event that you can focus your attention on. The point here is that you must have something positive that you're ready to shift your attention to when your thoughts turn negative.

They Disconnect

Given the importance of keeping stress intermittent, it's easy to see how taking regular time off the grid can help keep your stress under control. When you make yourself available to your work 24/7, you expose yourself to a constant barrage of stressors. Forcing yourself offline and even—gulp!—turning off your phone gives your body a break from a constant source of stress. Studies have shown that something as simple as an email break can lower stress levels.

Technology enables constant communication and the expectation that you should be available 24/7. It is extremely difficult to enjoy a stress-free moment outside of work when an email that will change your train of thought and get you thinking (read: stressing) about work can drop onto your phone at any moment. If detaching yourself from work-related communication on weekday evenings is too big a challenge, then how about the weekend?

Choose blocks of time where you cut the cord and go offline. You'll be amazed at how refreshing these breaks are and how they reduce stress by putting a mental recharge into your weekly schedule. If you're worried about the negative repercussions of

taking this step, first try doing it at times when you're unlikely to be contacted—maybe Sunday morning. As you grow more comfortable with it, and as your co-workers begin to accept the time you spend offline, gradually expand the amount of time you spend away from technology.

They Limit Their Caffeine Intake

Drinking caffeine triggers the release of adrenaline. Adrenaline is the source of the “fight-or-flight” response, a survival mechanism that forces you to stand up and fight or run for the hills when faced with a threat. The fight-or-flight mechanism sidesteps rational thinking in favour of a faster response. This is great when a bear is chasing you, but not so great when you're responding to a curt email. When caffeine puts your brain and body into this hyper-aroused state of stress, your emotions overrun your behaviour. The stress that caffeine creates is far from intermittent, as its long half-life ensures that it takes its sweet time working its way out of your body.

They Sleep

I've beaten this one to death over the years and can't say enough about the importance of sleep to increasing your emotional intelligence and managing your stress levels.

When you sleep, your brain literally recharges, shuffling through the day's memories and storing or discarding them (which causes dreams), so that you wake up alert and clear-headed. Your self-control, attention, and memory are all reduced when you don't get enough—or the right kind—of sleep. Sleep deprivation raises stress hormone levels on its own, even without a stressor present.

Stressful projects often make you feel as if you have no time to sleep but taking the time to get a decent night's sleep is often the one thing keeping you from getting things under control.

They Squash Negative Self-Talk

A big step in managing stress involves stopping negative self-talk in its tracks. The more you ruminate on negative thoughts, the more power you give them. Most of our negative thoughts are just that—thoughts, not facts. When you find yourself believing the negative and pessimistic things your inner voice says, it's time to stop and write them down. Literally stop what you're doing and write down what you're thinking. Once you've taken a moment to slow down the negative momentum of your thoughts, you will be more rational and clear-headed in evaluating their veracity.

You can bet that your statements aren't true any time you use words like “never,” “worst,” “ever,” etc. If your statements still look like facts once they're on paper, take them to a friend or colleague you trust and see if he or she agrees with you. Then the truth will surely come out. When it feels like something always or never happens, this is just your brain's natural threat tendency inflating the perceived frequency or severity of an event. Identifying and labelling your thoughts as thoughts by separating them from the facts will help you escape the cycle of negativity and move toward a positive new outlook.

They Reframe Their Perspective

Stress and worry are fuelled by our own skewed perception of events. It's easy to think that unrealistic deadlines, unforgiving bosses, and out-of-control traffic are the reasons we're so stressed all the time. You can't control your circumstances, but you can control how you respond to them.

So, before you spend too much time dwelling on something, take a minute to put the situation in perspective.

If you aren't sure when you need to do this, try looking for clues that your anxiety may not be proportional to the stressor. If you're thinking in broad, sweeping

statements such as “Everything is going wrong” or “Nothing will work out,” then you need to reframe the situation. A great way to correct this unproductive thought pattern is to list the specific things that actually are going wrong or not working out. Most likely you will come up with just some things—not everything—and the scope of these stressors will look much more limited than it initially appeared.

They Breathe

The easiest way to make stress intermittent lies in something that you have to do every day anyway: breathing. The practice of being in the moment with your breathing will begin to train your brain to focus solely on the task at hand and get the stress monkey off your back.

When you’re feeling stressed, take a couple of minutes to focus on your breathing. Close the door, put away all other distractions, and just sit in a chair and breathe. The goal is to spend the entire time focused only on your breathing, which will prevent your mind from wandering. Think about how it feels to breathe in and out.

This sounds simple, but it’s hard to do for more than a minute or two. It’s all right if you get sidetracked by another thought; this is sure to happen at the beginning, and you just need to bring your focus back to your breathing. If staying focused on your breathing proves to be a real struggle, try counting each breath in and out until you get to 20, and then start again from 1. Don’t worry if you lose count; you can always just start over.

This task may seem too easy or even a little silly, but you’ll be surprised by how calm you feel afterward and how much easier it is to let go of distracting thoughts that otherwise seem to have lodged permanently inside your brain.

They Use Their Support System

It’s tempting, yet entirely ineffective, to attempt tackling everything by yourself. To be calm and productive, you need to recognize your weaknesses and ask for help when you need it.

This means tapping into your support system when a situation is challenging enough for you to feel overwhelmed. Everyone has someone at work and/or outside work who is on their team, rooting for them, and ready to help them get the best from a difficult situation.

Identify these individuals in your life and make an effort to seek their insight and assistance when you need it. Something as simple as talking about your worries will provide an outlet for your anxiety and stress and supply you with a new perspective on the situation.

Most of the time, other people can see a solution that you can’t because they are not as emotionally invested in the situation. Asking for help will mitigate your stress and strengthen your relationships with those you rely upon.

What my company does:
Emotional Intelligence
Training and Emotional
Intelligence Certification

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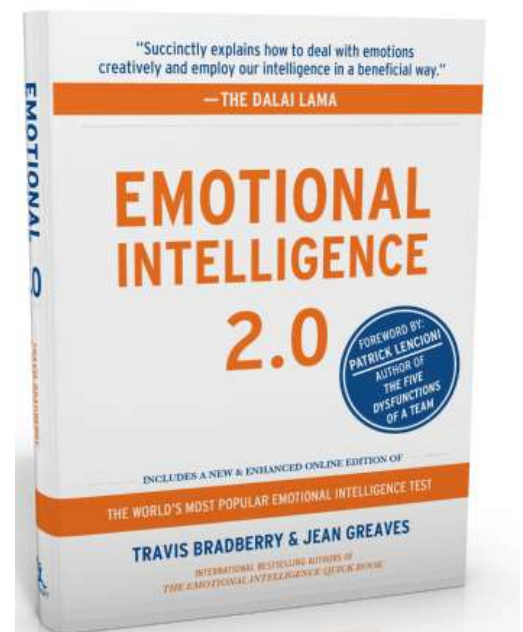
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Dr. Travis Bradberry is the award-winning co-author of the No. 1 best-selling book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0*, and co-founder of TalentSmart, the world’s leading provider of emotional intelligence tests and training, serving more than 75 percent of Fortune 500 companies.

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Amy Morin

10 strategies to make yourself mentally stronger

When most people set out to become fitter in the New Year, they're thinking about their physical fitness: Getting in better physical shape tops the list of New Year's resolutions. According to a Nielson survey, 37 percent of people aim to stay fit and healthy in the new year, while 32 percent of people want to lose weight. Sadly, most people will never achieve those goals. Statistically speaking, only about 8 percent of people keep their resolution.

If more people focused on their *mental* fitness, however, they'd likely become more successful in achieving the goals they set for themselves—physical fitness or otherwise. After all, your body won't do what your mind doesn't tell it. Building mental muscle is the key to self-discipline, delayed gratification, grit, and perseverance. And those are the skills you need to become the best physical and mental version of yourself.

Here are 10 resolutions that will help you grow mentally stronger:

1. I will spend at least 15 minutes a day in quiet reflection.

A few minutes of quiet time gives you an opportunity to reflect on your progress and think about what you want to do better. Schedule a few minutes every day to recharge your batteries with a little bit of solitude. It will help you gain clarity and renew your motivation to reach your goals.

2. I will do at least one tough thing every week.

Whether you sign up for a photography class or join toastmasters, do something that forces you to step outside your comfort zone. Facing your fears head-on can shift the way you see yourself. Rather than assume you need to avoid hard things because you might fail or because you can't tolerate the stress, you'll chip away at your self-limiting beliefs.

3. I'll write in a gratitude journal.

Write down three things you're grateful for every day and you'll change the way you see the world. Studies link gratitude to a multitude of benefits, from better sleep to reduced psychological distress. It only takes a few minutes each day, but it's an easy way to boost your mental strength.

4. I'll take better care of my physical health.

Your mind won't operate efficiently if you're not fueling it with sleep, exercise, and healthy food. But don't make your goal to be thinner or to look good in a bathing suit. Aim for building a healthy body so you can enjoy a healthier, stronger mind.

5. I'm going to develop a kinder inner dialogue.

The conversations you have with yourself impact the way you behave and how you feel. Harsh self-criticism only holds you back.

Commit to talking to yourself the same way you'd speak to a trusted friend and you'll unlock potential you never knew existed.

6. I'm going to become more aware of my feelings.

Aside from happiness or anger, most adults aren't comfortable sharing their feelings. Many are willing to concede, "I've got butterflies in my stomach," or "There was a lump in my throat," because it feels less vulnerable than saying they feel sad or scared. But your emotions play a huge role in every decision you make.

Decide to become better connected to your feelings. Label your emotions and spend time thinking about how they influence the way you think and behave.

7. I'm going to create a timeline for my dream.

A lot of people say, "I'd like to write a book someday," or "Someday I'm going to launch my own business." But since *Someday* never appears on the calendar, it's unlikely you'll actually do it. Turn your dream into a goal by creating a realistic timeline for yourself. Even if you can't tackle it for another a year or two, start researching or

learning more about your dream now.

8. I'll spend more time with friends and family.

It's easy to become so caught up in the day-to-day grind that you don't set aside time for friends and family. But studies show that spending time with loved ones is critical to your well-being. Make it a priority to spend time with the important people in your life.

9. I'll create a life that is in line with my values.

It's one thing to say you value giving back to the community or that you value caring for the environment—living according to those values isn't always so easy. Evaluate where you devote your time and energy and see if you want to make any lifestyle shifts that would help ensure that your life is in line with your values. Living according to your values is an essential component to mastering your mental strength.

10. I'm going to give up one bad habit.

Letting go of a bad habit can help you work smarter, not harder. So rather than saying you're going to eat more vegetables, commit to giving up that bag of chips you eat at lunch every day. Giving up bad habits that rob you of mental strength, like feeling sorry for yourself, will ensure your healthy habits are much more effective.

Build Your Mental Muscle

Don't overwhelm yourself by tackling too many things at once; start with one change you want to make. You can start new goals any time of the year. Maybe you'll decide to start a gratitude journal in January. Then, once you've turned that into a daily habit, commit to going to sleep 30 minutes earlier in February. Remember, genuine self-improvement isn't about setting a goal on an arbitrary date and declaring it a success or failure two weeks later. Mental strength training is about becoming a little better each day throughout the entire year.

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About the Author

Amy Morin is a licensed clinical social worker and psychotherapist. Since 2002, she has been counseling children, teens, and adults. She also works as an adjunct psychology instructor.

Amy serves as About.com's Parenting Teens Expert and Child Discipline Expert. She's a regular contributor to Forbes and Psychology Today.

Her expertise in mental strength has attracted international attention. Her bestselling book, *13 Things Mentally Strong People Don't Do*, is being translated into more than 20 languages.

Amy's advice has been featured by a number of media outlets, including: *Parenting*, *Time*, *Fast Company*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Elle*, *Cosmopolitan*, *Success*, Oprah.com, Health.com, Fox News, NBC, ABC, MSN, Lifetime Moms, and We TV. She has also provided on-camera interviews for Fox Business, Forbes, and TheBlaze TV. She's a frequent guest on a variety of radio shows as well.

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Benjamin Ball

Three ideas to make your leadership presentations more persuasive



Idea 1 - Write So It's Easy To Read

OK, this may sound obvious. But the quality of your writing will determine how well your presentation, or report, or pitch succeeds.

Here are a few quick tips that can make a big difference. Some are surprisingly simple, but often neglected. For example [How To Write So People Will Read – 6 Great Tips](#)

Idea 2 - Identify Your One Big Idea

How many great ideas did you have in your last important pitch or presentation?

Was it One, Two, Five or Ten? How many ideas do you need for an impressive and memorable pitch, One or Ten? Or were you missing that one Great Big Idea?

We have a powerful test to use on any pitch or leadership presentation. We call it The Takeaway Test. i.e. What would someone say about you after your meeting?

Learn more about [using The Takeaway Test here](#)

Idea 3 - Rehearse Like a Professional

Have you ever been in the situation where your team spends weeks perfecting a pitch document, but then does not practice the pitch meeting?

It's a bit like an Olympic athlete reading all the books, but not doing any training.

Our clients always insist on pitch rehearsals - because they see the immediate impact it makes. Think about a pitch rehearsal before your next pitch and, in the meantime, look at these [six ideas to make your pitch stand out](#).

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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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Braden Kelley

Do you have a powerful innovation story?



Many, but not all, innovations involve some kind of technology, and start as an invention. Many of these technology-based inventions that may eventually become innovations are created by startups, but many are created inside large companies as well.

In both cases, these technology-based potential innovations are often created by engineers or technologists that are well-versed in the problems they are solving to make the technology work, but not always with the problems that the technology may solve for customers. Often the inventors speak the languages of science and technology, which is not always the same language as that understood by the potential customers for their invention that they hope will become an innovation.

As I wrote before in the always popular, and often linked and liked – **Innovation is All About Value** – there are three keys to achieving a successful transition from invention to innovation:

1. Value Creation

Value Creation is pretty self-explanatory. Your innovation investment must create novel or incremental value large enough to overcome the switching costs of moving to your new solution from the old solution (including the ‘Do

Nothing Solution’). New value can be created by making something more efficient or effective, possible that wasn’t possible before, or by creating new psychological or emotional benefits. This creation of new value is what most people focus on, but you can’t achieve innovation without achieving success in the next two components as well.

2. Value Access

Value Access can also be thought of as friction reduction or experience design. How easy do you make it for customers and consumers to access the value you’ve created? How well has the product or service (or the experience of using it) been designed to allow people to access the value easily? How easy is it for the solution to be created? What is the employee experience like? How easy is it for people to do business with you?

These are some of the questions you must ask and answer as you seek to create success in the value access component of innovation.

3. Value Translation

Value Translation is all about helping people understand the value you’ve created and how it fits into their lives. Value translation is also about understanding where on a continuum your solution falls between the need for explanation

and education. Incremental innovations can usually just be explained to people because they anchor to something they already understand, but radical or disruptive innovations inevitably require some level of education (often far in advance of the launch).

Done really well, value translation also helps to communicate how easy it will be for customers and consumers to exchange their old solution for the new solution.

Unfortunately, not all three parts of innovation success are equally understood or valued.

Most people understand that the creation of new value (aka *value creation*) is a key component of innovation success.

Many people understand the concept of barriers to adoption and that *value access* is thus also a key component to whether or not an invention successfully makes the transformation into an innovation.

BUT, few understand that *value translation* is probably the most critical component to innovation success. Because value translation inevitably requires both explanation AND education in varying amounts, having a good Evangelist (see **The Nine Innovation Roles**) that is a gifted storyteller on your

innovation team will prove crucial to your innovation success. If people don't understand how your new solution fits into their lives and why they should abandon their old solution, even if it is the 'do nothing' solution, then you stand no chance of your invention becoming an innovation. And what's the difference between an invention and an innovation? Wide adoption...

Achieving wide adoption comes not from some catchy advertising campaign, but from creating ridiculous amounts of value in the solution itself, the way that people access the solution (or the experience that they have), and in the story you create around it.

The Role of Experience in Your Innovation Story

Many true innovations create an experience that someone wasn't able to have before or take a painful experience and turn it into a delightful one. The automatic transmission liberated millions of people from the struggle of successfully starting a car on a hill and the worry of grinding their gears every time they go to shift gears.

How does using your potential innovation make people feel?

What is the experience like?

Where is the experience awkward or full of friction?

Could it be better?

Experience design has become increasingly important because a good or bad user experience, customer experience, or employee experience creates stories, stories that get shared, stories that sometimes take on a life of their own. This is what happens when something goes viral.

Sharing of the story itself becomes a new story, meaning that people are now sharing two stories (the original story, and a new story about the sharing of the original story). The power of these shared stories is why the various fields of experience design are growing

both in terms of visibility and the numbers of people employed in these kinds of roles (customer experience, customer success, user experience, human-centered design, etc.).

When it comes to innovation, experience and design do matter.

Bringing It All Together

Crafting a compelling innovation story requires both a compelling value proposition and a memorable experience. When you have **both**, your innovation story will be more engaging, easier to tell, and more likely to be shared.

Your innovation story also requires the same type of design thinking process to achieve. You must:

1. **Understand** who your audience is
2. **Define** what they will find convincing about the value proposition and the experience that your innovation will create
3. Come up with **ideas** on how you will tell your innovation story (including the appropriate level of explanation vs. education)
4. Choose one and **prototype** your innovation story
5. **Test** it with people
6. And **iterate** until you find that your innovation story (as well as your potential innovation) is resonating strongly with your target customers

So, plan ahead. Design your innovation story at the same time you're designing a compelling innovation value proposition and innovation experience. Think about what people will say about your potential innovation as they begin using it. Show it to people and ask them for feedback about your potential innovation. Craft an explanation for it, build an education plan, and test both.

Take all of what you learn from asking and testing these things to begin crafting your innovation story, while also refining the design of the product or service, and the experience of using it, to make both more compelling. In doing so, at the same time you'll also make help your innovation story that much more powerful and increase your chances of achieving innovation success!

If you need help telling your innovation story, I can help you on the tactical side (commissioned articles, white papers, webinars, collateral, keynotes, workshops, etc.) or by building you a complete innovation evangelism strategy (for an external audience, an internal one, or both). [Click here to contact me.](#)

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About the Author

Braden Kelley is an experienced **innovation speaker**, trainer, and digital transformation specialist. He is the author of **Charting Change** and of **Stoking Your Innovation Bonfire**, the creator of the **Change Planning Toolkit™** and an InnovationExcellence.com co-Founder. Braden has been advising companies on how to increase their revenue and cut their costs since 1996. He writes and speaks frequently on the topics of continuous innovation, digital transformation, and organizational change. He has **maximized profits for companies** while living and working in England, Germany, and the United States. Braden earned his MBA from top-rated London Business School.

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Tom Koulopoulos

Six ways to make an unforgettable first impression

First impressions count; they are the gate through which you gain admission to the most important relationships you will have in your life, professionally and personally.

Human beings are like heat-seeking missiles when it comes to establishing someone's character, values, and sincerity. We can't help it, we're wired to connect. So while a true relationship is built on years of trust, the foundation for that trust starts in the first seven seconds of meeting someone, according to clinical psychologist and author of *Straight Talk*, Linda Blair. It's taken you about three times as long to read this far.

That's not much time but it's what you have. So how can you use it to make the best possible first impression, and then how do you build on those first seven seconds to make it unforgettable? It's amazingly simple and straightforward. Here are six proven ways to make an unforgettable first impression, whether you're doing it one-on-one, to a small group, or even an audience of thousands.

1. Know who you're talking to

Well before those seven seconds, do your homework. That might mean a little research or simply observing a person's surroundings.

When I first met Larry Ellison, Oracle's Chairman and co-founder, at his home, a full-scale reproduction of a Japanese fishing village, I began by asking him if the tranquility and beauty of his home provided respite from the many demands on his time. That launched us into a conversation about everything from how he loved to play acoustic guitar on his porch, to his kids, to the modest beginnings of Oracle. Sure, I had done my homework, but that quick connection turned what was supposed to be a 30-

minute meeting into a two-and-a-half hour genuine and authentic connection.

2. Eye contact

The single most telling behaviour that signals sincerity is making and maintaining eye contact. Few things are as unnerving as trying to have a conversation with someone who is periodically glancing at everything going on behind and around you. Our serotonin, oxytocin, dopamine, and endorphins (the feel-good chemicals that give us a sense of well-being and euphoria) all increase dramatically when we look someone in the eyes, and they look back. Do not lose eye contact during those first seven seconds. However, this is not a staring contest. Also engage through conversation or it just feels contrived and creepy. By the way, if you're doing this with a large audience don't just stare out at the crowd. Combine looking at all parts of the room with direct and regular eye contact with individuals. That combination will put you at ease and create a much more intimate setting for the audience.

3. Mirroring

Mirroring is the simple act of paying close attention to the person you're with and adopting the subtle nuances of their body language, the tone of their voice, even the words they use. This is not mimicry, which is a caricature of a person, but rather the ability to empathize. Think of it as tuning into their frequency. To hear someone, and to have them hear you, you need to be sensitized to the way they express and absorb knowledge. Simple things like mirroring their body language can signal coherence. Don't discount this one, it is among the most inherently human ways we connect.

4. Active listening

Being an active listener means understanding the person you are talking to before you try to have yourself understood. The temptation is to define ourselves before we fully understand someone else. Try repeating what that person has said to

make sure you have heard it. It may feel awkward to you but you'll be amazed at how well people respond when you make the effort to understand them first.

5. Using the person's name

This is a no-brainer and yet so few people do it. When someone calls us by name there is an immediate heightened awareness of that person. Don't say his or her name in every other sentence, but use it immediately after you meet them, at least once during the conversation, and at the close of a conversation. If you have a hard time with names use the person's name in context as soon after the start of the conversation as possible. That will reinforce your own recollection and show an immediate interest in knowing them on a personal level.

6. Being grateful

Never walk away from a first encounter without doing three things; thank the person(s) by name for their time, sum up the value of the conversation, and add a personal comment that draws on a non-professional aspect of the conversation. Showing you recognize a person for who they are means you're interested in them. Each of these can be misconstrued as techniques to simply charm. But if that is in fact your only goal, then beware of using any of these unless you are extraordinary well versed in the art of acting and theater. Sincerity cannot be easily feigned; it either exists or it does not, and it starts in just seven seconds.

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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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Andy Bounds

How to be introduced at a conference

I've spoken at hundreds of conferences over the past few years.

And I've been introduced in lots of different ways.

So, I know how important the intro is. A good one makes it easy for you to be confident. A bad one can wreck everything.

Two jump out as ones that *didn't* work...

One introducer had seen me deliver a similar keynote in the past. And, in his intro – which lasted ten minutes! – he told the audience my main messages I'd taught him last time. So, stealing all the content I was about to tell my audience!

Even better: the Grumpy Man, who said "I've been handed Andy's bio. It says that he's written some books. I didn't know he'd written any. And it says that apparently he's an expert on sales and communication. I suggest he comes up here and proves it." And then he walked off the stage. Nice.

Over the years, I've found there are two things that work best with an introduction. And I always request my Introducer mentions both:

1. Topic – why it's needed
2. Me – why I'm worth listening to

Topic – why it's needed

I always want my Introducer to start by saying why the topic is important – "Last year, we didn't

hit our sales targets. And, this year, we have a new competitor, who is slashing their prices, which is wrecking our margins. We need to be able to up our game, to overcome these challenges. So, we can hit our targets, and feel more confident going into sales meetings."

Me – why I'm worth listening to

Then, once people recognise the need for the topic, it's pretty easy to introduce me as someone who can help, using 2-3 of my relevant credentials – "Therefore, we've secured sales expert Andy Bounds to help us. We've chosen Andy because he (relevant credentials)."

That way, when I start my presentation, I know that everyone knows (1) the topic's important and (2) I know what I'm talking about.

This helps them have confidence in me.

And it helps me have confidence in my presentation.

Great for everyone!

And certainly better than "I suggest he comes up here and proves it."

Action Point

Next time you're speaking at an event, ask someone to introduce you by using these two themes – why it's needed; and why you're good. Don't just list your own credentials. People might think "She sounds amazing. But how

does her amazingness relate to me?"

And if you're introducing *someone else*, mention both elements. That kicks everything off in the right direction, makes everyone feel comfortable that the presentation is going to be useful... And, do you know what, when everyone thinks it's going to be useful, it usually is!

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About the Author

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

Are you following me on twitter?

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Kevin Stansfield

How to fall in love with your business (again)



The chances are, when you first started your business, you were very passionate about it. Everything was new and exciting, and at last you had a way for you to make your mark on the world, to do things your way, to set new standards, to bring something new to the market, to help more people - in short, you were in love with your business and the opportunities it promised for you.

No doubt that initial passion energized you to put in the long hours and hard work that are needed to get a business off the ground and get it growing.

But being in business for a long time can be a hard slog, and you are faced with constant ups and downs. The day to day challenges of looking for new sales opportunities, managing staff, keeping your customers happy, balancing the books, and the 101 other things that business owners have to deal with can grind you down and sap your enthusiasm.

If the honeymoon period is well and truly over for you and your business, maybe it's time to fall in love again, and reignite the passion that kept you energized for the first few months or years of your relationship.



But how can you do this? Well, I have a simple 5 step process for you:

Recognise what you've achieved so far

You had the guts to start your own business or buy a business.

You've worked hard and you've built that business up. You've employed people. You've given your customers what they need.

You've created something worthwhile and made a contribution to society. So, stand back, take it all in, and be proud of how far you've come. Give yourself a pat on the back, or maybe even open a bottle of bubbly!

Feeling good about yourself and your achievements will help you to feel good about your business too.



Clarify your vision for the future

Now you know where you are, you can decide where you want to go with the business. Your vision may have changed since you started the business, or maybe you never had a clear vision in the first place. So, it's time to look forward and decide exactly what your ideal future business looks like – what's the turnover, how many staff are employed, where are your premises, who are your customers?

Once you have the vision, you can make plans and goals to get you there. That will give you the focus and enthusiasm that may now be lacking. (Your future vision may be to sell your business and retire and that's great – you still need to plan for it, though!)

Make your team love your business as much as you do

Working with people that don't share your passion and enthusiasm is not good for your business, or for you. So, share your empowering future vision for the business with your team, get their buy-in and make them accountable for achieving the goals that are relevant to them.

Remember, you can improve people's skills but not their attitude, so it may be time to let some people go, recruit new team members with the right attitude, and make your business a great place to work.

Mix with like-minded people

Being in business can be a very lonely place. Family members may not understand the pressure you're under and anyway, may not appreciate you talking business when you get home. Finding like-minded people to talk to, who can understand the challenges you face and can provide support and advice, is really important to help keep you motivated and enthusiastic. (That's why we're here!) The late, great Jim Rohn said: "You are the average of the five people you spend most time with," so make sure you're spending your time with great people!

Make your business work for you

We believe that being in business should give you more life, not take it away. Your business should provide for you financially but should also enable you to be the person you want to be and do what you want to do.

In order to be happy and satisfied with what your business is giving you, you need to ensure that your business goals (that we talked about in step 2) are aligned to your personal goals. You'll need to find time to work **ON** not **IN** your business if you want to build a commercial, profitable enterprise that works without you, and lets you have the time and money to enjoy your life.

Who wouldn't love a business that did that for them?

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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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Greg Satell

Inside the battery race to power the 21st Century

The garage startup has become as much of an American icon in the twenty first century as the automobile and the drive-in were to earlier generations. The idea that anyone with an idea can change the world is as romantic as democracy itself, but it's not altogether true. A garage startup only works if there is existing technology to build on top of.

The problem is that every technology eventually runs out of steam. When that happens, progress will grind to a halt without a significant breakthrough. As technology becomes more complex, that type of advancement becomes so hard to achieve that it becomes out of reach for any single organization, much less a few guys in a garage.

That is essentially where we are with energy storage. **Lithium-ion**, the 40-year-old technology that powers everything from smartphones to electric cars is nearing its theoretical limits just as the renewable energy revolution is demanding cheaper batteries that can store more energy at lower cost. Solving problems like these requires a massively collaborative approach.

A Brief History of Energy Storage

The lithium-ion battery was originally discovered by the American scientist **John Goodenough**, in 1979, with funding from the National Science Foundation. Over the next decade, the technology steadily improved and by the early 1990s, it became commercially available in Sony Camcorders.

Since then, lithium-ion batteries have increased in energy density by a factor

of six, while costs have dropped by a factor of 10. That's made them good enough to power our phones and laptops, but they're still not powerful enough — or cheap enough — to power electric cars or the electric grid.

Experts believe that to create a true transformation, battery costs need be below \$100/ Kw/hour and the current technology is unlikely to get us there. So getting where we need to be is not a matter of simply improving efficiency, we have to come up with completely new materials with greater energy density and lower cost.

When the Department of Energy began thinking about how to solve such an enormous and seemingly intractable problem, it realized that it needed to take a very different approach. The result is the **Joint Center for Energy Storage Research (JCESR)**, which is currently in the fourth year of its five-year mandate to develop next generation batteries.

Pooling Scientific Knowledge

The basic idea behind JCESR is that the knowledge required to create a breakthrough solution is spread out among a diverse number of scientists working at a wide variety of institutions, such as the national labs and academic institutions. So, the first step was to combine their talents and coordinate research through a single hub focused on the energy storage problem.

Venkat Srinivasan, Deputy Director, Research and Development at JCESR explains, "National labs tend to have bigger teams of people working on bigger problems, while academic researchers are more specialized in their expertise. Our structure allows us to access stars in the academic world and apply their specific expertise to the problem of next generation storage."

"For example," he continues, "**Matthew Sigman** and **Shelley Minteer** at the University of Utah have done pathbreaking work in chemical stability in the pharmaceutical field, but we recognized that the same technology can help us make better batteries. Their work has really propelled our mission forward, while working on batteries has taken their research into new areas."

So combining the expertise of five national labs along with a number of the country's top universities gives JCESR an incredible amount of scientific talent. Yet the battery problem is about more than science. The aim is to come up with a solution that not only works, but can win in the marketplace, which is why getting input from private companies is crucial.

Bringing in Private Industry

Scientists are focused on discovering new phenomena, but have little insight into the practicalities of the marketplace. For example, a researcher that discovers a new material with vastly more energy density than current batteries will have no idea whether it is feasible to procure, manufacture and distribute.

That's a big problem, because by the time a scientist verifies his results, prepares them for publication and goes through peer review, it can take years before he realizes that he wasted his time. So getting input from partners and affiliates in the private sector has been invaluable for focusing research at JCESR on the most promising paths to a better battery.

It has also greatly benefitted the companies that have participated. As **Brian Cooke**, a Group Vice President at **Johnson Controls** told me, "We saw our involvement as an opportunity to shape the future, so the science coming out of JCESR would have the greatest benefit for our customers, our company and our industry. It has also enabled us to

interact with top notch researchers from some of the country's best labs.”

Yet it isn't just big companies that are benefitting. Through JCESR's affiliate program even small companies can participate, which gives them a better idea of how to focus their efforts. That's especially important for firms that can't afford to go off in the wrong direction and waste limited resources.

Mike Wixom of **Navitas**, a four year old company that focuses on military and industrial applications, told me, “As a small company, we're fighting for our survival on a daily basis. Becoming JCESR affiliate gives us an early peek at technology and you get to give feedback about what kinds manufacturing issues are likely to come up with any particular chemistry.”

Innovating the Discovery Process

Historically, the process of making a new battery has been mostly trial and error. Building a battery for use in a car has vastly different requirements than, say, for the grid or a power tool. So, for the most part, battery developers experimented with different combinations until they get the right specifications for the product they were trying to make.

One of the major achievements at JCESR has been to build tools to make this process more rational and efficient. The first is a computer model that analyzes the complex interplay between technical and economic factors that a battery will need to achieve. The second is materials and electrolytes “genomes” that known properties of the various possibilities.

“Moving to the materials genome is like moving from your local library to the Internet,” says Mike Andrew, a Director at Johnson Controls Power Solutions. “It lets our research benefit from the collective experience in the field, rather than just what we've tried ourselves. We've also found that discoveries of things that don't work are as helpful as things that do.”

JCESR has used these tools to develop four promising prototypes — two that are focused on vehicles and two designed for the electrical grid — that have the potential to break through the \$100/Kw hour barrier. It'll be another year before we know

whether any of these will be viable for the marketplace, but they are already creating excitement.

“We're hoping that some of the prototypes that are being developed in the lab now will help guide our strategic development and give us a leg up on the future,” Wixom of Navitas told me. However, as thrilling as it is to be on the brink of a major breakthrough, there was a real feeling among the people I talked to that the development of tools for discovery are just as important.

Shifting from Disruptive Markets to Grand Challenges

Today, energy storage is just one of many challenges that we face as a society. Like lithium-ion batteries, **computer chips are also approaching theoretical limits**. Other technologies such as **genomics, nanotechnology and robotics** are just beginning to hit their stride.

In essence, we're moving into uncharted territory. Over the past several decades, technology has progressed within well known paradigms. Better batteries made our devices smaller, faster chips made them more powerful and more sophisticated software allowed them to do more. These have made our lives better, our businesses more profitable and society better off.

Yet today, are moving into a **new era of innovation** where simply impr old technologies and identifying new applications for them will no longer suffice. We now need to **shift our focus from disrupting markets to taking on grand challenges** that are beyond the capabilities of a single organization or, in many cases, a single industry or field of study.

So, in the future, we are going to need to build more platforms designed for mass collaboration like JCESR, where government, academia and industry can pool resources, define new approaches and break through technical barriers that were once considered to be beyond our reach.

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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’:

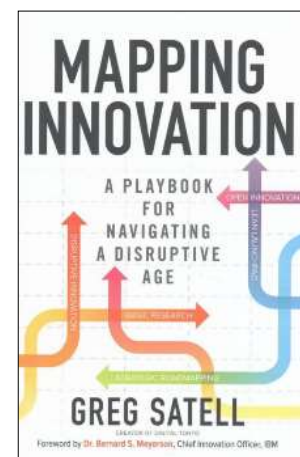
<http://inthebooks.800ceoread.com/news/articles/the-2017-800-ceo-read-business-book-awards-longlist>

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Kannan Chettiar

Are social media checks necessary?



Traditional background checks and due diligence checks on individuals and/or companies uncover *historical datapoints* of the subjects involved and this is extremely important before engaging the subjects. Apart from these checks ([listed here](#)), only Social Media Checks provide an ongoing perspective of the subject's current behaviours. Social Media Checks are in fact really Open Source Derogatory Indicators.

The question is - **Background screening companies like Avvanz are allowed to conduct social media checks? Is it ethical and legal?** As long the candidate gives a documented consent (aligned with the Data Privacy laws) to background checks including Social Media Checks, the "compliance" aspect is taken care of. We are not going to compel the candidate to let us access with his/her login or accept our FRIEND REQUEST. In my opinion, as long as a candidate knows we are going to analyze their social media profiles, the "ethical" concern is addressed too.

That being said, we might have limitations as the candidate can switch his profile to PRIVATE thus limiting our research. Though there are intelligent algorithms that can enable us to observe the social media presence and behaviours of the candidate, all our checks are ethical and carried out to evidential standards.

What are we exactly looking for on the social media platforms?

Using the candidate's First Name, Last Name Email, Date of Birth, Education and Employment details, we will be able to avoid potential risks of scrutinizing the wrong person with the same name.

Using our algorithms, we will vet across the internet for possible negative matches and negative and/or derogatory content refers to the following areas:

- Radicalism
- Sexually explicit content
- Potentially unlawful activities including theft and fraud
- Potentially violent behaviours
- Racism and/or Demonstrations of intolerance
- Unprofessional comments (vulgarity)

The research can become very extensive and detailed. Our derogatory indicator to date has exceeded 14% i.e. out of every 100 profiles, more than 14 have some form of "disturbing" content.

Some snapshots (blacked out to remove sensitive information) can be found below to give you an idea of the kind of information we can unveil through these checks.

Excerpt on "Radicalism" related findings:

The Subject was found to be following a number of highly controversial Muslim clerics on Facebook. They include:
 [REDACTED] banned from preaching in Singapore as his teachings have been deemed by authorities to be 'contrary to the spirit of religious and racial harmony.'
 [REDACTED] - banned from entering Britain, Australia, Denmark and Kenya, banned from re-entering Germany, ordered to leave Bangladesh, and arrested in the Philippines for 'inciting and recruiting people to conduct terrorist activities.'
 [REDACTED] - has been recorded preaching for violence against homosexuality and adultery.
 [REDACTED] - his preaching is currently banned in Bangladesh, Canada and the United Kingdom. India has issued an arrest warrant for him over money-laundering and terrorism charges.
 [REDACTED] has been recorded preaching views such as it being a sin for Muslims to celebrate Mother's Day. On cleric's page, images of an individual carrying rifles could be seen.

In addition to interaction with numerous social media content published by the clerics above, the Subject was also found to have liked a Quran quote asking for victory to be granted over 'disbelieving people'. It is worth noting that preachings of this quote was considered controversial by Singapore authorities in March 2017, and led to an Imam preaching it being fined and deported from Singapore.

Excerpt on "Potentially Criminal Behaviour"

The Subject was found to have posted drug related comments on Facebook on a number of occasions, the most prominent instances of which included:

- 15 November 2015: *"give some one ket instead of coke last night sorry"*
- 12 October 2015: *"has only gone and found loads of magic mushrooms", further commenting "dunno if there proper ones but i found em on the park they look good, gonna eat em anyway"*
- 11 August 2016: *"has just had half an acid hit time to go weird happy days"*

Excerpt on "Criminal Behaviour - Sex Offences".

The Subject was found to feature in a video titled [REDACTED] from [REDACTED] came to meet a child' on 'YouTube' on 05 August 2017. The video stated: [REDACTED] now a convicted paedophile was given 12 month suspended sentence for 2yrs, and placed on the Sex Offenders Register for 10yrs."

Can Employers conduct these Social Media Checks themselves?

Just browsing through pages of Facebook or LinkedIn will not reveal much. Complex algorithms built with bespoke toolkits and powerful search engines along with professional social media researchers alone can produce a productive and comprehensive report.

How does Social Media Checks compare against Adverse Media Checks?

Adverse Media Checks consist of negative media from thousands of global news sources, capturing millions of articles of interest from breaking news, current events and relevant media dating back to the early 1900s. Again, like the rest of the background checks, Adverse Media Checks refer to past data points.

In conclusion

These kinds of Social Media Checks definitely add value to the background checks as past data along with current dynamic data yields a complete thorough profile of the candidate thus aiding employers in making critical hiring decisions. With more of these checks now being very prevalent, it's hoped that individuals will exercise more caution and responsibility when commenting, liking, following and even sharing posts on the various social media platforms.

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About the Author

Kannan Chettiar, is Managing Director of Avvanz as well as an established Certified Trainer. He has worked with several global and regional organizations to map out highly contextualised, customised and localised training and development programs. He has delivered thought leadership talks and webinars on Industry 4.0 and the critical skills needed for future economy.

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Janet Sernack

Solving the innovation problem



One of the most challenging and thrilling aspects of reinvention, transformation and business game shifting is the opportunity it creates for continuous, experiential and deep learning and change.



This certainly brings to life the new mantra that many organization, here in Australia, are sprouting around innovation, which is to “fail fast to learn quickly”. Whilst most of us know that organizational innovation involves making serious and significant change, what most of us are challenged by is how change impacts, affects and disrupts people’s four-core human structures: *cognition, emotion, body and will*.

There is a distinct opportunity for organizations to better accept, acknowledge, and learn how to adapt, flow and intentionally shift within these four structures. Doing this enables them to affect the deep, powerful and positive changes that innovation requires:

because they will deliver successful organizational change or reinventions, develop innovative organizations and achieve business transformations that result in increased competitiveness, growth and value.

Working on the people side of innovation

Our global innovation eco-system team met online recently to explore how these four structures impact and play out on the people side of Innovation. We discussed and agreed that most people are naturally wired to resist, rather than embrace change. We explored how the clues to accepting, flowing and shifting people’s auto-pilot and reactive responses to change, lies in these four-core human structures: because change catalyzes and ignites people’s differing range and depths of fears, usually resulting in a painful physiological stressed state.

People feel uncomfortable, out of control, insecure or unsafe, or a mixture of these painful stress states.

This suggests that when people are expected to change by “failing fast to learn quickly” all these painful stress factors, combine unconsciously with their old memories, perfectionism, and emotional anchors around making mistakes and failure, punishment and retribution, and implicitly come out to play in the form of resistance.

This is what prevents them from seeing, adapting to, and realizing the possibilities and benefits that change brings.

We discussed how these factors impact significantly on how some organizations currently approach innovation and how resistance gets catalyzed, ignited and comes out to play, along with any inherent complacency, resulting in “innovation permafrost” settling in.

This manifests and festers with their already “fractured attention” in denying that real changes are needed, embeds risk adversity and justifies sustaining the status quo. They may even appoint an innovation manager and seek short term training solutions to tick off their innovation “to do” list.



The innovation disconnect

We explored how these factors cause not only resistance to change, but also how they inhibit and prevent organizations from adapting, competing, growing and innovating through discovering, design and delivering innovative solutions that add value to the quality of people's lives.

This “disconnect” is most apparent between the approaches organizations take towards embracing innovation.

Between what we describe as a “true” fluid strategic, systemic and learning anchored approach, which truly enables and supports people to “fail fast to learn quickly” and a short term, episodic “methodical” training and functional based approaches to innovation where people don't have permission and safety to “fail fast to learn quickly”.

Fluid Strategic and Systemic Innovation

We described “true” fluid innovation as passionately purpose driven, strategic, leader led, systemic & human centered approach involving;

- Being empathic and compassionate as to where people are at, being accepting and acknowledging of their fears and resistance, allowing them and giving them permission to be vulnerable and express their concerns, and listen carefully and acknowledge these as being true for them. (*cognition, emotion, body and will*)
- Igniting people's intrinsic motivation to pull them towards the possibility of a more compelling and desirable future (when the change has been implemented), that is meaningful and purposeful to them (aligned to their needs & values) and worth the discomfort of pursuing (*cognition, emotion, body and will*)
- Enhancing their emotional capacity including resilience and determination (*cognition, emotion, body and will*)

- Effecting deep mindset & behavior changes that enable them to take smart risks, improvise, experiment and learn from failing. (*cognition, emotion, body and will*)
- Coaching people through the discovery, design and delivery phases of innovation enabling them to learn by doing; inventing, iterating, getting user feedback (positive and negative) and pivoting creative ideas with a minimal viable product, process or service. (*cognition, emotion, body and will*)
- Developing people's capabilities through developing their generative discovery skill set to enhance and embed curiosity, collaboration and creativity into the workplace. (*cognition, emotion, body and will*)

Ultimately resulting in initiating a culture of innovation where people deliver system and process improvements, and disruptive and radical products and services that customers value and cherish, as well as secure organizational growth, competitiveness and deliver an authentic business transformation.

Episodic Methodical Innovation

We described episodic “methodical” innovation as functional or training programs based incorporating specific subjects including: innovation

management, design thinking, agile and SCRUM programs. These train people in the crucial “how to” skills that are required to effect system and process improvements, which are also important to overall innovation success.

Ultimately resulting in people delivering mostly incremental and differentiated products and services that customers value and cherish and deliver improved efficiencies and productivity within the sphere of continuous improvement.

The innovation solution

We agreed that taking an “either/or” approach, in other words, just taking “either” a fluid, “or” just a methodical approach is a serious waste of an organizations time, investment and efforts.

We agreed that organizations that courageously commit to embrace a “both/and” approach will generate its adaptiveness and agility, as well embed deep and continuous learning that enables and empowers people to innovate by “failing fast to learn quickly”.

By integrating the “fluid strategic and systemic approach” with the “episodic methodical” approach, organizations can flow and flourish in delivering the outcomes and achieving the business performance they want.



It all depends on the change or breakthrough an organization wants

A recent article “**Digital-Era Change Runs on People Power**” from the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) states that; “*putting people first can lead to innovative thinking and dynamic results*”.

This suggests that organizations have a fundamental choice to make – they can take the safe and less disruptive surface based change approach and improve efficiencies and productivity and possibly embed a culture of continuous improvement.

Alternatively, they can invest their valuable resources, time and efforts in a “*both/and*” integrated, courageous, risky and continuous learning journey along the “*road less travelled*” and intentionally disrupt people’s complacency and resistance by:

- Safely taking them outside of their comfort zones and working with, and across their four-core human structures.
- Adopting a fluid, culturally anchored, strategic and systemic approach that will develop people’s capacity to be adaptive.
- Designing and delivering a deep blended learning journey that builds people’s capability to innovate by enabling and empowering them to safely be, think and do things differently.

As many of us know, journeying along “*the road less travelled*” is never the easier or quicker path, to take. In this case, it requires investing in building people’s and organizational capabilities through emphasizing and embedding a culture of robust continuous learning that maximizes people’s collective genius by integrating their four-core structures; *cognition, emotion, body and will*.

This ensures that innovation becomes a collective, creative and collaborative challenge that results in making innovation part of everyone’s job, every day.

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About the Author:

Janet is the Founder, CEO & Chief Katalyst 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 Oroton, Chanel and Seafolly.

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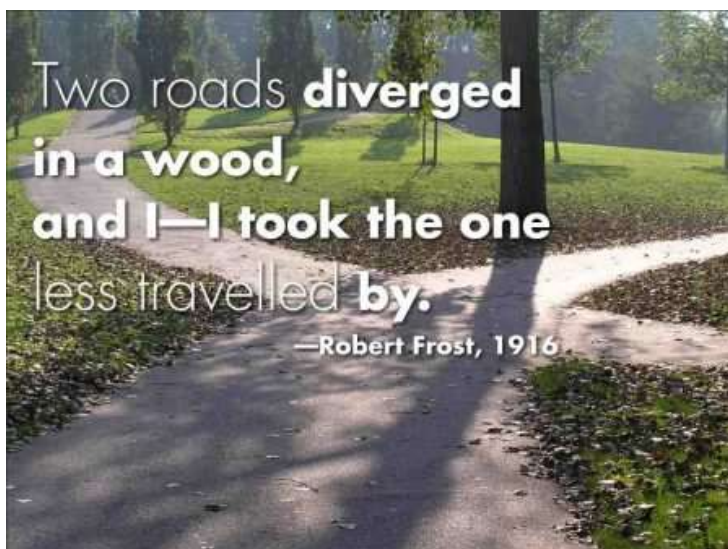
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Favour Erebosi- Samuel

Customer service is the new marketing



Somehow, I consciously have a thing for excellent customer service, I know that when it's properly done, your business will smile, because it is the greatest business strategy. If you doubt it, ask Zappos, they will open your eyes to the winning power in excellent customer service.

Here are a few tips to help your business stand out upon execution:

Know Your Product or Service-

You can only give what you have, if you don't know your product well, I wonder how you want to convince me to buy it.

Be Friendly-

I have always said that if you cannot smile, you have no business opening a shop.

Say Thank You-

That customer that took time to visit your shop or site, neglected several others and chose you, you owe him/her that simple word!

Train Your Staff-

Anyone who represents your brand in any capacity should understand the business, its vision, mission, values, culture etc...

CUSTOMER
SERVICE

Show Respect-

They say Customer is king, why not, he pays the bill after all. Do all you can to always make him happy irrespective.

Listen-

Your customer is constantly speaking either by body language, word of mouth, her absence and referrals, always listen, it will help your business.

Be Responsive-

Never make your customer feel ignored. Always respond to their queries in time.

Ask for Feedback-

Feedback is key for any business that will thrive. You can employ different ways to generate feedbacks, it could be questionnaire, you can use customer surveys etc. The key is always ask for feedback.

Use the Feedback You Receive-

There is no point asking for feedback if you will not convert them to productive use. Find areas to improve

in your business. Excellent customer service often comes down to consistently checking in with your customers and making sure they are happy with not only the products and services you're selling, but also the process of purchasing, ordering, working with you, etc. If you do that successfully, you are on your way to becoming known for providing excellent customer service.

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About the Author

Favour Erebosi- Samuel is the Branding & Marketing Coordinator at Wecosystems Int'l Ltd. A public speaker, author and blogger.

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August J. Aquila

No heir apparent – What does the small firm do?

I recently had the opportunity to speak to small CPA firm owners from several different states and was struck by a consistent theme voiced in the audience – “I sometimes wish I wasn’t the owner.”

In reality, I don’t think they really meant this. They were voicing their frustrations about being the sole person responsible for the practice, the clients and the employees. This is a common problem among CPA owners today – no one seems interested in taking over the practice. So, what can be done?

Unfortunately, there is no silver bullet or magic solution to solve this problem. I do, however, have some solid suggestions that may help you work through the problem. And, if you start sooner than later, you will have a better chance of successfully passing the baton to someone else.

Eight Steps to Effective Succession Planning

1. How do I know it’s time to sell or merge?

There is perhaps one key indicator that it’s time for you to move on or do something else.

I call it the “Fun Factor.” Ask yourself these simple questions:
Am I having more or less fun building the practice?

Am I still excited about getting up in the morning and going to the office?

Are you complaining more about clients, employees and the practice in general?

Would you mortgage your house to grow the practice?

If you said no to two or more of the above questions, then it’s time to start thinking about your succession plan.

2. Develop a plan.

There are only so many things you can do with your practice. Sell it to someone internally, sell it to someone externally, merge with another firm or simply decide to shut the lights some day by letting the practice gradually dwindle down. Only you can determine which one is the best course for your practice.

3. Get your personal finances together.

You will never be able to retire until you have a solid retirement plan. Make sure you are taking full advantage of tax deferred retirement programs and don’t be afraid to look to client opportunities to invest in.

4. Form an advisory team.

You don’t want to be doing this yourself. You will need others to bounce ideas off of. Again, look to your client base, is there a business owner you admire and respect. Perhaps one of your clients has already gone through a succession event. You might want to include someone from your family, your spouse or other relative. A local attorney, financial advisor or M&A consultant can also help. Succession is as much an emotion event as it is a financial one.

5. Determine the value of your practice.

Depending on the market and geographic location, your practice may be worth from 80% to over 100% of revenue as a rule of thumb. Few buyers will pay cash up front. Most transactions are structured as an earn-out paid over 3 to 5 years. The more the practice is dependent on you, the less it is worth.

6. Begin to implement the plan.

If you have decided what to do with the practice (See #2 above) now you can start the implementation process. This could take as long as 3 years. If you think it will be an internal sale, then you need to speak with your successor and start developing the transition plan. The more you know what you want to do, the more options you will create for yourself.

7. Transfer skills and clients.

Make a list of your skills, top clients and referral sources. Start the process of transferring this knowledge to your successor.

8. Don’t wait until the practice or your health declines.

It’s best to sell your practice when it and you are at the top of your game. Too many sole practitioners wait until something drastic happens. I often say that a practice is like an ice cube on the sidewalk on a hot summer day. It not only melts, but it evaporates very quickly. There are multiple examples of practices that have lost 70% or more of their value in only a few months.

Final Thoughts

It's never too early to think about your exit plan. When you reach your 60's it's time to get more serious. When you reach 65, make sure you have a detailed plan laid out, even if you plan to work for many more years. No matter what your age start developing other interests and hobbies. Remember, the best succession plan is the one that provides the owner with the most options.

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About the Author

August Aquila is the founder and CEO of AQUILA Global Advisors, LLC and is a key thought leader for professional service firms (PSFs). He has worked with various types of PSFs in the US, Canada, India and England.

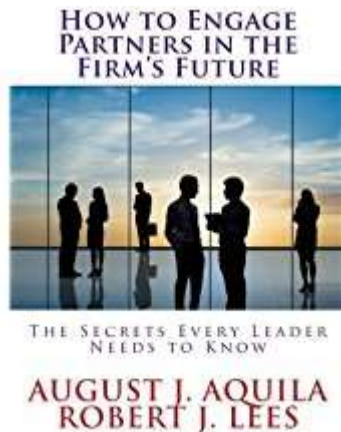
August brings a wealth of hands-on experience to his clients and presentations. He was a partner in a Top50 US CPA firm and a senior executive with American Express Tax & Business Services, Inc., For 30 years he has advised PSFs in the areas of succession planning, mergers and acquisitions, compensation plan designs and partnership issues.

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Recent books include How to Become the Firm of Choice, What Makes a Great Partnership, Client at the Core: Marketing and Managing Today's Professional Services Firm; Performance Is Everything – The Why, What and How of Designing Compensation Plans; Compensation as a Strategic Asset: The New Paradigm; What Successful Managing Partner Do and Engaging Partners in the Firm's Future. August holds an MBA from DePaul University (Chicago) and a PhD from Indiana University (Bloomington).

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