

# INTRODUCTION

*Men are not prisoners of fate, but only prisoners of their own minds. – Franklin D. Roosevelt*

To begin, let me ask you some revealing questions. As a business owner, can you walk away from your business today for one or two months and come back to find it operating smoothly and profitably? Can you even escape for two weeks? Have you ever had a work-free vacation? If your answers are “no”, you don’t have a successful business, you have a glorified job in which you are trapped! You don’t have an effective business system; you are the business system! You are a prisoner of your own making.

Let me be very clear. No matter what industry you are in, you should not be a prisoner to your business! If you are, you have it backwards. Your business should serve you and your dreams. It should give you greater freedom, not less. In fact, your business, properly designed, should function practically without you, not because of you. It should run predictably and automatically whether you are in the office or not, in the store or not, out in the field or not, on vacation or not. Your business should not depend upon your presence, personality, problem solving and perspiration for its daily survival. If so, your business does not work, you do!

Bottom line, you should run your business; it should not run you, your family or your life. Your business should work harder so you don’t have to. It should be systems-dependent and not owner-dependent for its success. It should have its own heart, mind, and soul – it should not steal your vital organs and spirit!

Stop for a moment and think of the consequences. If everything in your business flows through you and is dependent upon you, then **you** are dramatically restricting the growth and profits of your company. As a single human being, there are natural limits to the

amount of work, transactions, problems, and decisions that can flow effectively through you in a given day. Stop being a bottleneck or clog. Otherwise, you will continue to restrict the potential of your employees and business and ensure your persistent exhaustion. Stop missing out on greater personal freedom, money and happiness.

If you are the owner of a business that is at least two years old and has annual revenue between \$100,000 and \$20 million, this book could be for you. If at times you feel like a prisoner/slave to your business or struggle to manage its growing size and complexity, this book is probably for you. If you wish to be more effective, work less and make more money, this book is definitely for you.

Furthermore, this book should be mandatory for any of your current or future advisers and coaches. These professionals can't help you if they don't understand your real issues, challenges and the strategic solutions that are available. Small business coaches affiliated with The Growth Coach have been professionally trained and certified in our on-going coaching and accountability process and understand deeply the strategic solutions addressed briefly in this book.

On the flip side, this book is not intended for entrepreneurs with a business still in diapers – two years or younger. No disrespect, but such proud owners are still blissfully naïve and high on the passion, promises and adrenaline rush associated with a newborn enterprise. They generally are too busy to hear this message. Starting out, such owners are willing to accept 12-hour workdays, being chained to the business, and intoxicated by the busyness and details of a new venture. However, the few wise enough to shape their businesses while still in the nursery will avoid many “growing pains” and headaches down the road.

Think of this metaphor. Creating a baby is rather easy and enjoyable; raising a child is much more challenging. Similarly, starting a business is fairly simple and fun; managing a growing and

complex business is much more difficult. As such, this book is aimed at the entrepreneur who faces the daily realities and challenges of managing a growing and chaotic business. The owner who is overwhelmed, overworked and wondering what the heck they got themselves into.

This book is for the owner who feels like a hostage to the business. It is for the owner who still feels compelled to control and do everything in the business. It is for the owner starting to question and re-examine his/her life, priorities and personal sacrifices. In short, this resource is intended to serve as a formula for freedom for any distraught entrepreneur who feels enslaved and overwhelmed by his or her business.

If you are seeking better approaches to managing your business and life, I can help. As an entrepreneur and business adviser/coach for nearly twenty years, I fully understand the unique mixture of pleasure and pain that comes with owning and managing a growing business. I know the long hours and stress, the heavy burden of responsibilities, and the loneliness, fears and frustrations. I have spent my life helping small business owners, my heroes, to shape better businesses and shape better personal lives. If you are willing to keep an open mind, I am ready to help you.

Let me be very clear, you are the expert in your business and industry. I am not and will never claim to be. My expertise is guiding business owners to unlock greater potential in themselves and their businesses. To help them enhance their strategic mindset, focus, actions and results. Over a decade ago, I developed a process to do just that called The Strategic Mindset™ Process.

This quarterly strategic-focusing process helps owners, like you, to slow down, reflect, and decide on the critical changes necessary to improve their businesses and personal lives. They discover practical and highly effective personal management and business management

strategies and mindsets. They gain clarity of direction, peace-of-mind and greater confidence pursuing their business and personal goals. This year-round coaching and accountability process has become the foundation for The Growth Coach, a national company specializing in coaching small businesses.

Through this book and the strategic path I map out, I guide owners to become more effective, focused and productive. The life-changing process described within this book allows owners to go to work “on” their businesses, “on” themselves, and “on” their specific issues, opportunities and goals.

This book, this process, helps owners to face reality – to see what is working and what is not working in their lives and businesses. It helps them to “burn off the fog” that keeps them from seeing their businesses and personal lives for what they really are – not as they wish, hope or dream them to be.

This book shows you how to remove the clutter and non-essential “stuff” from your days. To prevent you from wasting your time, talents and life-force on the wrong activities – the trivial many. Rather, this book helps you to identify the highest and best use of your time and talents – getting you focused on the vital few activities that produce massive results.

This resource should help you to better learn about yourself and what you truly desire from life and your business. After all, knowing who you are, what you want and where you are going creates a powerful sense of clarity. Few owners possess such clarity and confidence.

For the last eleven years in particular, I have been on a crusade to re-educate and re-focus business owners to lead more, work less, and enjoy greater freedom, financial success and happiness. In short, trying to get owners to think and act strategically and effectively.

Are you a strategic business owner? To find out, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do you see the big picture and have a long-term view?
- Do you think more like a CEO than an employee?
- Do you create an annual business plan?
- Is your leadership purposeful, proactive, and planning-based?
- Do you constantly think about the direction and objectives of the business?
- Do you focus on your entire business and not just the technical work of your business?
- Have you created plans, procedures and policies to help operate your company?
- Have you developed and documented all your key business processes?
- Do you utilize the leverage of marketing to grow your business?
- Do you spend more time on important matters rather than trivial/urgent matters?
- Have you created a systems-dependent business instead of an owner-dependent business?
- Do you conduct one-on-one monthly coaching sessions with your managers and/or key employees?
- Do you avoid getting buried in the day-to-day details and headaches of the business?
- Have you shaped your business more by design than by default?
- Are you experiencing more fun and fulfillment than frustrations?

If you answered “no” to most of these questions, you can benefit greatly from this book on becoming a strategic business owner. In short, a strategic business owner (SBO) gets the highest and best return possible for his time, money and effort. He or she focuses on working smarter, not harder. So does this book.

Be warned however, this book is not an easy read. I don't write in entertaining fables or parables. That's not my style and that's not how I have helped hundreds of business owners over the years get free from the debilitating details of their companies. If you want entertainment, buy a novel or watch HBO. This book contains real world, in-your-face, practical advice. While this medicine may not always taste great, this prescription should help you feel better about yourself, your business, and your life.

If you want different results, you must take different steps. You must get out of your comfort zone, stop the excuses, face reality and acknowledge something is broken. Turn down the ego. It is time to become honest, time to reflect, and time to re-focus. It's time to stop treating the symptoms and start addressing the real points of pain. Be prepared to re-think, re-calibrate and re-organize your business and management approach to achieve long-term solutions to your hassles and headaches.

Regardless of how frazzled and swamped you may feel, know that there is hope for real relief. Your past does not have to equal your future. Whether you have no employees, 10 employees, 100 or 1,000 employees, there are practical solutions to gain more freedom, flexibility, and fulfillment in your life. **However, the answer is not to shift into higher gear; it is to shift mindsets. For you workaholics, let me repeat. Sustained relief comes from shifting mindsets and strategies, not gears. You must adopt a strategic mindset.** To gain a fresh start, you will need to re-boot your mental software and try new attitudes and strategic approaches.

At my very core, I am a teacher. I have gained invaluable insights and lessons to share with you as a business owner myself and as a marketing consultant, a strategic planning facilitator, a business coach, a sales/marketing executive, a sales trainer, and a CPA. From these experiences, I feel well qualified to help business owners to get strategic, get free, and get happy.

This resource will help you transform your mind and habits in order to transform your business and life for the better. This educational journey will allow you to re-design your business and re-gain your personal life and freedom. While I can't promise you nirvana, I am confident this book will help you map out your path to guilt-free liberation. It will connect the dots to reveal a more enjoyable and less stressful way to run your business and life. It will help you shape your business by design, not by default.

Henry David Thoreau stated, "Things do not change; we change." I hope to share valuable lessons and insights with you that will help you change and rediscover the joy, passion and blessings of being a business owner.

Daniel M. Murphy

*"Enhancing the strategic mindset, focus and results of small business owners, managers, and the self-employed."*