

Face Reality

Points to Ponder

- *We are slaves to whatever we don't understand.*
Vernon Howard
- *Honesty is the first chapter of the book of wisdom.*
Thomas Jefferson
- *Nothing about ourselves can be changed until it is first accepted.*
Sheldon Kopp
- *We lie loudest when we lie to ourselves.*
Eric Hoffer
- *The first and best victory is to conquer self.*
Plato

Entrepreneurial Reflection

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced.

For many of you, in as little as two to three years (and regardless of the level of financial success achieved), your entrepreneurial dream of freedom, independence and wealth has started to warp into a partial nightmare. Your wish to be master of your destiny has degenerated into your being a slave to your business, your employees and your customers. The fire in your belly has been replaced by a growing uneasiness in your gut.

Habitually, you are still working too many hours, wearing too many hats, and handling too many things. Sadly, the entrepreneurial lows have become deeper, last longer and are more frequent. As your business has grown, your fun and fulfillment have not. In fact, most of you suffer from the generalized feelings of anxiety, mental

fatigue, and of being trapped in the business. For sake of simplicity, I have termed these feelings, **the business owner blues**.

For years, you have deluded yourself. You kept telling yourself that one day you would get caught up, slow down, and have more free time to do other things. That the blues would eventually fade. In reality, the sixty to seventy hour workweeks continue. The stress continues. You can't even escape the business for a few relaxing, no-work days. You still scramble like a hyperactive squirrel preparing for a harsh winter.

Furthermore, you are coming to realize that being a workaholic, micro-manager, control freak, dictator or hands-on technician does not work and is a miserable way to run a business, much less lead a life. Working harder, acting tougher, or being more involved with daily details is not the path to greater freedom, joy, or peace-of-mind. Rather, it is a guaranteed path to burn out.

How did you get to this point? Odds are, you were a gifted technician (programmer, electrician, painter, landscaper, CPA, mechanic, chef, attorney, carpenter, salesperson, etc.) who caught the "entrepreneurial bug" several years ago and started, acquired or inherited a business – one that probably mirrors your technical skills and experience. Now, as you try frantically to maintain control of your growing company, you are likely overworked, overwhelmed and suffering from a full-blown case of the business owner blues. You are tired. You feel like a slave to your business. As it grows, you work harder and become deeper enslaved. The work, the problems, and the company revolve around you.

If you are honest, business ownership is probably quite different from what you expected and from what you have been prepared to handle. If not held in check, the very strengths that made you a successful technician (detail orientation, hands-on doer, technical expertise, day-to-day focus, etc.) can be real liabilities to you as a business owner.

Technical expertise alone is never sufficient to build and manage a healthy and profitable business. You must provide the vision and leadership of a Chief Executive Officer (CEO) and the order and systems of a Manager. You must get strategic to get free! You must learn to focus on the entire business, not merely the technical work of the business. You must elevate your mindset, focus and actions – focusing on the vital few things that really matter and make a difference.

For example, being a good plumber contrasted with creating and operating a successful plumbing business are two different worlds and sets of challenges. Each role requires very different mindsets and skillsets. To be effective, the latter requires strategic leadership; the former requires technical “doer-ship”. Just because you know how to do the daily technical work of plumbing doesn’t qualify you to design, build and manage a business that does the work of plumbing. This is a fatal assumption most would-be entrepreneurs make.

If you are a technician masquerading as an owner, be warned! Your pipes may burst. You have the wrong perspective and are doing the wrong type of work. Because you are comfortable with and good at doing the technical work (for example, plumbing), by default and out of habit, as your company grows, you will end up doing more and more plumbing work. You will find it hard to escape the frantic pace. Soon, the business will have you and your life held hostage. You will forever be trapped under the sink or hovering over a broken toilet. Why? Because your business is broken too! You are not thinking and functioning as a strategic business owner; you are toiling and sweating like a plumber.

Time to Face Facts

Accept the fact that it is no accident you hold this book in your hands. Out of either inspiration or desperation, you are seeking

alternative approaches. Your current beliefs, habits and actions are not yielding the results you want. Odds are, you desire greater success, peace-of-mind and joy. I too want you to achieve greater pleasure from your business. Furthermore, in addition to your business plan, I want you to have a fulfilling life plan. I want you to make a life that works for you, not just make a living from your work. I want you to be successful **and** happy. I want to help drive your success and balance your life!

For change to occur, however, you must stop playing mind games and admit that something about your business is not working. While sacrificing long hours each week may have been necessary the first few years, continuation of such a frantic pace is symptomatic of deeper issues. You should not live this way! Something is wrong. Something is off. You know it in your gut. Others probably sense it in your moods, in your eyes and on your face.

It is time to face reality! You and your business have some problems that require some solutions. Very simply, you can't change what you do not openly acknowledge. A problem properly identified and acknowledged is a problem half solved.

To begin the transformation and healing process, you need to do some serious reflection. Be brutally honest when you answer these questions:

- Do I often question, “Why do I have to do every dam thing myself?”
- Am I still working too much and making too little?
- Am I trapped working “in” my business instead of “on” my business?
- Do I ever wonder if business ownership is truly worth the time, effort, headaches, hassles, and sacrifices?
- Do I feel trapped on a treadmill, moving faster and faster, but going nowhere?

- Do I constantly face frequent interruptions and repetitive questions from my staff?
- Do I go home many nights feeling mentally and physically drained?
- Do I confuse busyness with accomplishment?
- Do I dread the drudgery of facing and solving the same issues and problems each and every day – the burden of re-creating the wheel time and time again?
- Do I daydream about regaining my sense of freedom, joy, passion, and peace-of-mind?
- Do I have anxiety about drowning in projects, problems, deadlines, crises, meetings, employee issues, unanswered voicemails/emails, customer complaints, administrative trivia, and on and on?
- Do I feel like a master juggler with too many balls up in the air and dreading they will soon begin hitting the floor?
- Am I forever chained to a phone, computer, email, or pager?
- Am I tired of having customers rely on me personally for services, solutions and satisfaction?
- Am I fed up with missing family time, family events, and making other personal sacrifices on a semi-regular basis?
- Do I crave more free time to do the things that matter most to me?

Admit to the Problem

If you answered “yes” to most of these questions, don’t feel guilty, ashamed or embarrassed. You are not alone. Most owners have never learned to be strategic. Role models are scarce. As such, dysfunctional businesses and owners are the rule, not the exception.

Like you, most owners feel that they have been sentenced to a life of servitude and some even suffer from the blues. Unfortunately, because of pride, shame or ignorance, this sad condition has been

kept hidden in the corner office for too long. Through this book, it is time to unveil this entrepreneurial, dirty secret.

Starting now, you should not have to endure this much discomfort and frustration associated with your business. You do not have to live this way! You should not be consumed by your business and frustrated with your life. Stop and think, why in the world, as the owner, should you have to touch every transaction, be involved with every decision, help solve every problem, or handle everybody's job in some fashion? You shouldn't! It doesn't make sense. Something is broken! You cannot succeed alone. You don't have enough hours in a day or enough energy or bandwidth to go it alone. Pain is a good indication that something is damaged and needs to be healed!

Let this book serve as your shock therapy. Realize that you aren't the only one suffering. Think about how your stress and blues are negatively impacting your employees, customers, vendors/suppliers, friends and if applicable, your spouse and kids. Hear this wake-up call! It is time to radically shift your business beliefs and behavior. It is time to expand your view of new possibilities for managing your business and life. The better your business functions, the better your life will function.

You deserve to be free from the daily grind; after all, you own a business, not a job. You should actually enjoy the journey of developing and running a business and not defer your personal life and happiness until you retire or sell. Live life now! Do not get so caught up in making a living that you forget to make a life. If your

personal life is suffering because of your company, either your leadership approach is misguided or your business design is broken, maybe both!

At this point, simply admit that your business centers on you and is totally dependent upon you. Admit that you are buried up to your eyeballs in the details of the business. Admit that you are a prisoner

to your business. Admit that instead of your business giving you greater life, it continues to drain more of your personal time and peace-of-mind. Admit that while your headaches and hassles grow, your freedom shrinks.

As you will see, most, if not all of these problems center on your being a day-to-day focused owner instead of a strategic business owner. To get free, you will have to get strategic. You need to adopt a strategic mindset, focus and approach to running your business and your life.

Get a Coach

The famous psychologist, Abraham Maslow, has stated, “What is necessary to change a person is to change his awareness of himself.” After serving entrepreneurs over many years, I have learned that you will not make the changes necessary to improve your life and business without someone holding your feet to the fire. You could benefit from a business coach or better yet, a year-round coaching and accountability process. You need someone observing the truth, that is, your outward and repeated behavior. Human nature doesn’t allow for such objective self-evaluation and feedback. Humans are too subjective. We judge our surroundings and ourselves by our inward perceptions of reality, which very often are mild distortions if not complete illusions.

Even with this guidebook, you will not be able to achieve such a strategic transformation on your own. No significant and sustainable changes will occur without a real-world evaluation and accountability process. You will need additional coaching to achieve real and lasting breakthroughs. Even great athletes (i.e. Tiger Woods) need coaches to help elevate their thinking, talents and results.

You will need an objective, caring coach who will challenge you and hold you accountable for growing and changing. Someone who helps burn off the mental fog that is clouding your objectivity. Someone to challenge your old, limiting assumptions. Someone who monitors your progress. Someone who holds you to a higher standard of success and excellence. Someone to ask you the tough questions. Someone to get you to slow down and do deep reflection and analysis. Someone who helps you define and achieve both your personal and business goals.

You will need an objective coach that can help you re-think and recalibrate your assumptions and approaches. A professional business coach will help you achieve this critical renewal of the mind. You must move away from typical business owner practices and beliefs. Conformity is your jailer. For maximum results, engage a dedicated business coach – someone who has a proven process to help you get more of what you want and less of what you don't.

To work with someone who knows the philosophy and methodology of this book inside and out, search out a small business coach affiliated with The Growth Coach. They are professionally trained and certified in The Strategic Mindset™ Process, our year-round coaching and accountability process. The quarterly strategic-focusing process is affordable, guaranteed, and will help you make the necessary transformations of mindset, habits and business strategies.

Regardless of the help you choose, be open and be coachable. Meet regularly with your coach. For some, quarterly is enough. For others, monthly coaching is necessary. Ask him or her to monitor your adopting and implementing the philosophies, strategies and habits as suggested in this book. The value of receiving candid, objective feedback on your progress during these accountability sessions cannot be overstated.

Other Tips & Suggestions

As you will discover, the success system in your hands is a practical and no-nonsense guidebook that comes from the collective success, pain and lessons of others. The wisdom captured here emanates from my own business successes and failures along with the struggles and triumphs of the many clients I have served over the years.

Please realize, however, there are no shortcuts or tricks contained in this book. You, and you alone, are the agent of change. You must tame your mind so that it doesn't automatically react in old, harmful, habitual ways. You must internalize and fully apply these ideas in a way that is unique to, and appropriate for, you and your business. Adopt and adapt.

Guard against dismissing these ideas as simple and obvious. As most things in life, success is less about ideas and more about aggressive implementation. Knowing what to do and doing what you know are very different things. Your task is to consider carefully these ideas and then fully implement those that make sense for your business. Again, use your accountability coach to get important things done!

For self-employed owners (soloists), you should begin to apply these strategies as you grow your business and add employees. Your challenge will be to define and document the different job functions you currently perform and eventually hire people to replace you in those technical roles. Even if you decide to remain solo, you can still benefit greatly from the strategic discussions on a CEO mindset, business system creation and documentation, leadership, business planning, marketing, people management, and learning to let go.

As you will undoubtedly note, certain themes and ideas will repeat throughout the book. This is not a case of redundancy but a belief in

the power of repetition. Some new ideas need to be sown continually to take root. Studies show it takes three exposures to a new idea before it is learned, a fourth exposure to reinforce it, and a fifth to internalize it and own it. Embrace the repetition and don't fight it.

Make this book your own. Highlight key ideas and jot down key thoughts. Only when an idea is written down do you truly own it. Make good ideas your prisoners. Write down those philosophies and strategies that you wish to implement.

Finally, judge this book on its effectiveness of transforming your mind from doer to leader and from that of an employee to that of a CEO. If this book helps transform you to be more strategic and proactive, you will be well on your way to more profits, more joy, more freedom and more peace-of-mind.

However, don't be unrealistic or impatient with your transformation. You won't change your mindset overnight. Stepping out of your comfort zone will take on-going courage. You may take a step back to advance two steps ahead. It will take some time and help from your coach or a coaching process; don't get discouraged. The long-term joy will be worth the short-term discomfort and sacrifice.

The answers and wisdom you seek are already within you; this book will merely help release them if you are ready. I pray that you have the humility to keep an open mind, the willingness to change your mindset, the courage to unlearn some of your assumptions, and the resolve to take aggressive action on some new ideas, philosophies, and strategies.

Suggested Action Items:

- Admit to yourself that something is broken in the way you have designed and lead your business. Resolve to take corrective action with the help from this book.
- If you have not done so, mark the heck out of this book – write down notes, highlight key concepts, etc. Go back and underline key revelations. Make this book your own.
- After reading each chapter, take aggressive action on Suggested Action Items appropriate to your situation. Jot down your own to-do list as well.
- Commit to finishing this book within 30 days. Share this pledge with a key person in your life. Give that person a firm date 30 days out by which you will be finished. In 15 days, have him or her contact you in order to gauge your progress. Encourage them to kick your butt if necessary.
- Insist that each of your key business advisers reads this book as well to foster a common understanding and vocabulary of the process needed to improve your business and your personal life. If they aren't willing to partner with you in this important journey, consider getting new advisers!
- As most things in life, success is less about ideas and more about aggressive implementation. Knowing what to do and doing what you know are very different things. Select an accountability coach within the next 21 days. Choose someone you trust to hold you accountable for objectively reviewing your business and personal life and for making the changes necessary to improve your freedom, joy, and profits. Most important, have them help you to adopt a strategic mindset. Ideally, you want a business coach with a proven, year-round coaching/accountability process.
- Accept fully that you, and you alone, are the agent of change. Take full responsibility for your transformation.
- After you have thoroughly read this book, start meeting with your coach on a regular basis (quarterly or monthly). In

your one-on-one coaching sessions, you may wish to focus on each chapter of this guidebook.

- Buy a copy of this book for your coach and insist that your coach thoroughly reads and understands the strategies in this book. Your coach can't help you if she or he does not know the process.
- Embrace the power and benefits of repetition. Also, make good ideas your prisoners – write them down. Take voluminous notes and capture ideas in writing.