

YOUR BUSINESS BRICKYARD



*Getting back to the basics
to make your business
more fun to run*

HOWARD MANN

You can do anything if you have enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm is the yeast that makes your hopes rise to the stars. Enthusiasm is the sparkle in your eye.

It is the swing of your gait, the grip of your hand, the irresistible surge of your will and your energy to execute your ideas. Enthusiasts are fighters. They have fortitude.

They have staying qualities.

Enthusiasm is at the bottom of *all* progress.

With it, there is accomplishment. Without it, there are only alibis.

Henry Ford

YOUR BUSINESS
BRICKYARD

by HOWARD MANN

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About this book

Business is supposed to be fun to run. It felt that way when you got started, right? But somewhere along the way, stress and complexity buried all the fun. Getting through the day became the focus instead of realizing your business's true potential.

If you are nodding your head in recognition, this book is for you. You know everything in it already, but, as one of my favorite sayings goes, it has become “hard to read the label from inside the bottle.” This book contains sparks to remind you of the power of simpler times, the power of getting the basics of business perfect. Whenever things feel like they are getting away from you, whenever your business does not feel fun to run, the Business Brickyard will help you reconnect with your goals and passion while reminding you that the basics will support you always.

INTRODUCTION

I stumbled into the Business Brickyard when I was thirty-three years old—although I wish I had remembered it much sooner. I had recently sold the freight and logistics company I'd been running for six years (and working in for more than twelve); a big milestone in the life of a young business owner. But

I felt as wrung out as if I'd narrowly survived drowning and only at the last minute managed to suck in a lungful of air.

What had started as a passion became a private hell. The years that led up to selling the company were a whirlwind of massive turnaround work and a daily knock-down drag-out fight for survival. I had bank pressure, staff problems, and poor-paying clients. Being caught in the middle of a never-ending “us too” spiral of matching services with competitors who had significantly more money than us sent us on that slippery slope of doing more for less. We had to scrape to pay the bills while trying to find the space (and time) to re-invent the company so it could live up to its promise of being “fun to run.”

I dreaded going to work each day. The weekends offered little comfort as they were just a time out when I couldn't be in the battle. It was lonely, scary, all-consuming, frustrating and not what most people equate with business ownership—what, as I later found out, many, *many* others experience. When it was over, I realized how many years had passed by me. I owned part of a truly great company—a company filled with amazing people that served some terrific clients. But I didn't enjoy the ride or have time to enjoy what made my company great.

Too many business owners are going through what I went through. Running a business has become too lonely a path. The more complex a business grows, the more a lack of having a rock-solid foundation will compound problems and divert attention to the wrong things. Scores of business owners wake up at (the proverbial) 2:00 AM

agonizing over why they lost an account to the low-cost corporate behemoth, why their latest marketing blast isn't making the phones ring off the hook, or they just have that nagging feeling that a lot more needs to get done. (For me, it was always the drive home that had me thinking of all the things that were not happening fast enough.) Everyone wants to figure out the “secret sauce” that will instantly propel his or her business to that elusive “next level.” What they really need to do is go back to their Business Brickyard.

The Business Brickyard

The best way to avoid or eliminate the seemingly unavoidable path to all-consuming complexity and stress is to take a step back to reconnect yourself and your business to the timeless basics of running a business.

I call these basics The Business Brickyard. Here's why...

When I started college, my alma mater's football team was closing in on a national record—the national record for the most consecutive losses.

But that year they had a new, no-nonsense coach who got the team refocused on executing all the basics perfectly: playing hard on every play, blocking, tackling, running hard, and catching the ball. Lo and behold they won their first three games of the season.

By the fourth game, though, they started to believe their hype a little too much and began forgetting the fundamentals that powered their victories. The receivers dropped and fumbled passes as they focused more on pulling off all kinds of fancy moves, and generally did everything except catch the ball. The team stumbled to a disappointing loss.

When a reporter asked the coach what he was going to do in response to the loss, he said he was “sending his receivers back to the brickyard.”

The “brickyard” was a practice drill where the receivers stood 20 feet apart and tossed an old, red brick back and forth to each other. The concept is a simple one: If you don't pay close attention to the very basic skill of catching a brick, it will hurt—a lot.

No fancy moves, no flying catches, just catching a brick. I never forgot that simple image of two hands catching a hard, red brick.

When I sold my business, I had time to reflect on what went right and what went wrong. And I remembered that brickyard image from college football. I realized the brickyard was the perfect metaphor for what business owners need: guidelines (or the most basic of practice drills) that will bring back the sense of control and confidence that trumps adversity.

These guidelines are what we teach our clients at The Business Brickyard, the strategy, marketing, and communications agency I now own. At TBB, we aim to utterly eliminate whatever it is that hinders your ability as a business owner to enjoy your position properly.

You see, business owners should not have to go through what I went through. At TBB we help clients reconnect to a real purpose, focus on the fundamentals of business, master great marketing, and engage in persistent innovation in both the online and off-line worlds. In short, we help our clients make their businesses fun to run. And it is supposed to be fun! If you let it, owning a business can be the greatest freedom you have for your career and the life it supports.

I come across so many companies caught up in all kinds of fancy programs, initiatives, visions of grandeur, etc. The owners have forgotten the simple things that consistently generate cash for the business; they have lost touch with their “brick” foundation where customers and profit are always protected. The race for something that feels like success has created a dizzying blur that feels impossible to escape.

Don’t get me wrong. I love innovation, marketing, branding, and using technology to do things better. To me, there is nothing better than a breakthrough idea. But answering phones really well, calling people back when you say you will, responding to emails promptly, and actively listening to exactly what your customers really want, must always come first. These kinds of business fundamentals have always worked and always will.

To see the results of this philosophy I only need to contrast my old business experiences with what I now enjoy with TBB. We have had steady and reliable growth year after year and we’ve done it minus the constant worry I used to carry around every day. Most importantly, our success has come without worrying about competitors, relying on the approval of a bank executive, or putting the company at risk at any time.

When you start with the premise that you are supposed to be enjoying your business, it becomes much easier to recognize when you are not. When you remember the importance of the basics, you ensure that you are running your business and that it isn’t running you. **The way to sustained success is not to pile on complexity, but rather the opposite.**

Increase your focus on executing your basics perfectly and you will increase your capacity to provide that key service or product that is unique to your business.

This book was written for all the business owners who tell everyone business is great but who know in their hearts it could be better—better financially and better in terms of how running your business makes you feel. The concepts (“bricks”) presented on the following pages are actionable today. So let’s get at it! Join me in picking up the bricks and building a new foundation for you and the business you run.



RECONNECT WITH YOUR PURPOSE

REMEMBER WHEN you started your business (or even started in it) and were filled with purpose, passion and possibility? Some people might tell you that you've "grown up" since then and learned "the way the real world works." Pity.

I think you had it right when you started, and the more you lost contact with that original connection to a deeper purpose for your business, the less fun it has become. It's time to recognize that before anything else has a chance to take root and grow, you need to reconnect to that purpose and let everything else your business does grow from it.

Lack of any meaningful purpose in your marketing and positioning statements is a recipe for apathy, and rightly so. Finding purpose should be the first

“Only a clear
—even idealistic—purpose can provide
the direction, unity and mutual respect
that bind a company to itself and its
customers and creates a truly unique and
exciting brand [...] Purpose becomes the
moral engine of a company, the source of
its energy.”

Nikos Mourkogiannis

Purpose

thing you do when you hit the Brickyard. Your goal is to reconnect with the true power of your business. Nothing else can grow consistently without it. As Thomas Kempis said, “The loftier the building, the deeper the foundation must be.”

Your purpose should be a true reflection of why you do what you do and what makes your business more fun to run. It should live at the intersection of what you truly do better than anyone else and what your clients truly care about. It should serve to power and filter initiatives, strategy, and ideas. If any initiative does not connect to your purpose you can quickly toss it aside and move on.

Think about the U.S. airline industry. Most airlines do all the basics poorly. (Fortunately, they get the flying part right). Then along comes Southwest. All the basics are done really well: prompt turn-around for planes, simple pricing, friendly service and a focus on getting you from point A to point B. They have a purpose that could be stated as “Efficiently helping people travel to where they need to go.” And, guess what? Passionate customers! Southwest changed everything. Nothing fancy about them that others could not copy. And yet they don’t or can’t. Southwest started in their Brickyard and just kept perfecting the basics. And those basics worked. Big time.

James Dyson, the famous pioneer with the yellow vacuum cleaner, once said, “I just think that things should work properly.” He started a phenomenon in house cleaning, not with the big earth-

shattering concept, but just with a very strong sense of purpose.

Maybe your company doesn’t need The Big Idea. Maybe it just needs a stronger sense of purpose. Purpose fuels passion and passion is the endless, limitless fuel that keeps your business fun to run.

Companies should spend more time finding and communicating that purpose. And they should spend even more time executing ways to make it truly tangible to clients.

In order for us to capture the core purpose that is uniquely yours, we have to go all the way down to the passion and vision that live at the core of your business. During this process, try to focus on the early years of your business and the dreams that inspired you. I am sure the dreams are still there now, but they can get drowned out by the “noise” that has built up as your business evolved.

The ideas behind your purpose transcend your company. The truths of your idea exist whether or not a company is there to put them into practice. The ideas are universal. 🍷



PRACTICE DRILL

What Is Your Company For?

To understand and uncover your purpose properly is to first see it beyond its own borders. Take a moment to reflect and write about what your company is for. What higher belief is it expressing? Don't think about what you do, but why you do it. Why do you get up every day? What do you like about your business, what it does and what it can do? How, in any small way, are you trying to change the world? Then consider what parts of that business your clients **truly** care about. **Purpose will turn into profit at the point where what you believe and do best connects with what your market truly gives a damn about.** An unbeatable combination.



ALL TRUTH IS IN THE CASH ACCOUNT

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WITH THE LOW COST of borrowing money and the allure of each new business idea that seemingly can't miss, it is all too easy for a business to quickly find itself earning less than it is spending.

When I owned that fairly sizable freight and logistics company, the industry was rapidly consolidating. It was not long before my company began to lose money a few months at a time. Now, (here is the part that may sound all too familiar) we always had at least one big prospect that was close to making a decision to use our services, or a new office that needed just a little more time to grow to profitability. We had competitors take business from us because, we thought, they had some technological advantage that we now had to build to compete (we'll tackle that lie

shortly). Or they undercut our pricing in some desperate attempt to oust us from the playing field.

These rationalizations are almost always traps that keep you from dealing with the truth. A good friend and mentor, Charlie Bahr, quickly brought me back to the truth each time I got caught up in these common “if only’s.” He would say, “Howard, all truth is found in the cash account.”

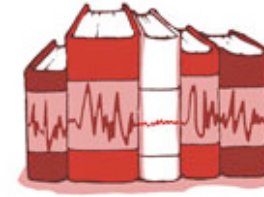
Harsh? Perhaps. There is, of course, more to business than the cash in the bank. But **the best way to stay in control of your business is to start by spending less than you take in.** Give that control away to banks, investors, or anyone else and some of the purest aspects of owning your own business start slipping away.

There are plenty of people who will help you make finance a very fancy game. They might say things like, “You have to spend money to make money.” And that is fine as long as you have it *first* to spend it.

I say, use these simple rules:

- a. If you want to reduce the stress of owning your business, spend at least a dollar less than you earn.
- b. If you want to invest in your business, try a new strategy, or be innovative, do it with the money you know you have and not on what you hope may be coming in.
- c. Never bet your company on any one all-or-nothing idea.

When you get that new big client, they pay the first invoice, and you see it in your cash account, then they are truly a client. Always remind yourself that your cash account is that rare, honest friend who will never lie to you. 📖



FIND YOUR TRUE STORY

THERE IS A LOT OF TALK about businesses discovering their “story.” What I don’t hear much about is how to decipher your true story from your false story.

When I say “false story,” I am talking about the lies and rationalizations we tell ourselves to prove ourselves right or wrong about things that happen to us in life. That false story is really the filter that we run every experience through to fit into the world as we want to see it. This story is the result of years of old and often incorrect thinking which simply serves to protect us from some painful truth.

Businesses are prone to false stories too. How could they not be? Businesses are run by and comprised of a whole bunch of people that each has his or her own set of these false stories. A business’s

false story might be comprised of reasons why they won or lost a client, reasons why they are not making enough profit, reasons why their competitors stole that client away, how the customers are all a pain in the neck, are never happy, etc., etc.

All stories. False ones.

If we are honest with ourselves, perhaps in a private moment, we might recognize such stories as the excuses they often are.

If your competitors were really as bumbling and awful as you are convinced they are, how is it that they are not only still in business, but are competing with you so well? If you were really right about your story, you would have more business than you could handle.

What if you told yourself that you lost a piece of business because some of your competitors, right now, really are better than you? What if you admitted to yourself that you really didn't pay proper attention to the personalized service you touted during the sales process? Would that be so bad? You wouldn't have to close your doors or fire the staff. But you would have the chance to find a different way. Owning up to your false story allows you to find your true story.

Only your true story provides a solid jumping off point to take aggressive action and effect lasting change. 📌

PRACTICE DRILL



Lose Your Story, Find Your Truth

Think of the last three to five clients you lost or the last few prospects that chose your competitor over you. Write down the reasons you told yourself and/or everyone else why you lost. Look for your false story.

Now write down what the truth could be about each situation.

See how much easier it is to see how to take action from the truth list? The false list lets you sit idly by ranting about how unfair business is. A waste of time and opportunity.

Now write down the first action you can take. Turn those actions into initiatives in your business and real changes will occur in the culture and feel of your company. Quickly.



LOSE YOUR NEMESIS

I BELIEVE THAT every business has at least one “nemesis”—an arch-rival competitor, the company that stole a big client, stole a key member of your staff, or otherwise just consistently pisses you off in some way or another. The more business owners I work with, the more it seems to be a key impediment to getting to their unique truths, creativity, and power.

Obsessing about your competitors, trying to match or best their offerings, spending time each day wanting to know what they are doing, and/or measuring your company against them—these activities have no great or winning outcome. Serious point. Instead, you simply prohibit your company from finding its own way to be truly meaningful to its

“**At Netscape,**
the competition with Microsoft was so severe, we’d wake up in the morning thinking about how we were going to deal with them instead of how we would build something great for our customers [...]
What I realize now is that you can never, ever take your eye off the customer [...]
Even in the face of massive competition, don’t think about the competition. Literally don’t think about them.”

Mike McCue

Former VP of Technology at Netscape

clients, staff, and prospects. You block your company from finding its own identity and engaging with the people who pay the bills. Put another way, **“Keeping up with the Joneses” never lets you enjoy your personal life. Why would that adage help you to enjoy your work life?**

The more work becomes about your competition and less about the customers who need your attention, the more owning your business will feel like an endless, stress-filled game of catch up and one-upsmanship.

This is not “focus on your customers” theory disguised in different clothes. The focus is to find a more permanent path to breaking out of a fundamentally bad habit. Here is a fact that you should not avoid:

Your competitors have never paid your bills and they never will. 📖

PRACTICE DRILL



Goodbye Nemesis, Hello Fans

Here is a simple program for business owners to go through to lose their nemesis. Think of it as a sort of a competitor addiction intervention.

1. Write down an exhaustive list of every thing you know about your competitors: what they do, the secrets you know, what the market should know about them, etc. Come on, get it all out.
2. Take your list, find a very tall building, go to the roof, and hurl the list off the roof. Or, for the more civic-minded of us, put that list through the shredder.
3. Now write a list of your best customers and a list of your staff members who really care about the future of your business.
4. List out a way you could show them appreciation on a regular basis.

Next steps: Take time to learn about the people from Steps 3 and 4. What are their goals and dreams? Focus on the specific things you can do to help them achieve those goals. Remember, you now have the time to do it since you no longer have to think about all of that crap from Step 1.



SINGLES AND DOUBLES

IN RAM CHARAN'S *Profitable Growth Is Everyone's Business*, he gives a fitting name to the best long-term business building strategy I know. This strategy has become a mantra we continually preach to our clients at TBB. It is at the core of what has made our own business grow. The strategy? "Focus on hitting singles and doubles."

As Mr. Charan so perfectly puts it: "Home runs don't happen every day or even every decade."

The dot-com age and the stories that continue to get media coverage have pushed the business community to focus way too much on the home run. Business owners will put their business in peril (or will hand it over to a bank or venture capitalist) trying to find that million-dollar idea. Enormous amounts

of time, energy, and money are spent on this misdirected focus. Big, *big* mistake. **How can you enjoy the everyday of running your business if your success rests on the rare occurrence of "hitting a home run?"**

A surer and more consistent path—one that does not exclude home runs—is going for "singles and doubles." Hitting singles and doubles means focusing on growth based on improvements or natural extensions of your strategy, business model, customer needs, and technology. Singles and doubles come from disciplined, creative, and innovative improvements to all the fundamentals of a business. Singles and doubles do not come from a look in the rearview mirror. Rather, they are a result of looking at the business from the outside in, from customer needs backward into the company. In fact, they form the foundation for the possibility of a home run.

Having the patience to hit singles and doubles dramatically changes your ability to be in better control of the future of your business, and it shows your clients you are in a state of constant growth and improvement—plus you'll enjoy the ride. The more you focus on singles or doubles, the better your odds of turning one into a home run by its own momentum. 🏆



PRACTICE DRILL

Plan a Keynote

One way to make sure you consistently deliver **and** communicate those singles and doubles is to plan a keynote address twice a year at which you announce your company's latest news.

Set up an event specifically geared for your clients and a handful of great prospects.

From your unique perspective as the business owner, you will show them all of the cool things you have been doing over the past six months (many that you have promised them from the last keynote), provide sneak peeks at amazing projects in the works, and let your clients become infected by your enthusiasm. Make it far more than a speech. Make it a showcase for the passion you have for your business. Let the people on your team get out front and shine. Make it a truly remarkable experience for everyone.

The sustained word of mouth your keynote will create will easily surpass the marketing initiatives you have planned. At a fraction of the cost. Set a date today for your first one and start a list of what you want to talk about.



RELATIONSHIPS NOT SALES

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BY THE MIDDLE of 2005 I found myself totally frustrated and disenchanted with the whole cold calling, prospecting, and sales thing. It is a never ending chase and, frankly, quite an empty treadmill of an existence. (Does anyone truly enjoy it?)

In my seemingly endless search for something that did not feel like a sales process and/or cold calling super script, I uncovered Keith Ferrazzi's terrific book *Never Eat Alone*. I also reconnected with another book I had read over fifteen years ago, Harvey MacKay's *Dig Your Well Before You Are Thirsty*. The premise of both these books is as simple as it is powerful: Personal relationships power your business and the best business relationships are personal.

“It’s human

nature for people to take precisely as much interest in you as they believe you’re taking in them. There is no stronger way to build relationships than taking a genuine interest in other human beings and allowing them to share their stories.”

Danny Meyer

Setting the Table

If you focus solely on enriching your business relationships, the rest will take care of itself. People give orders to a salesperson, but they form partnerships and grow businesses with people they have relationships with. Which tactic lets you build an enduring business? Which is more rewarding on every level?

Borrowing from the old eighty/twenty rule, I believe that 20% of your contacts (maybe even as few as 10%) equal 80% of your revenue and success. The big secret to success is delivering extraordinary value to that 20% over a sustained period of time—which comes down to fifty or so contacts for most of us.

So how do business owners get caught up in not focusing on the right relationships? In our quest to collect business cards and store every person we ever met into address books and cell phones, we wind up with a monster list that is impossible to manage. This monster list lets that all-important list of fifty key contacts fall through the cracks.

What if we could create a system that was totally focused on the most important relationships we have? What if this system could help us focus on what our key clients’ goals are and how we could help them realize those goals? This simple, focused, and “pay it forward” approach puts a lot of positive energy out that will generate real returns.

The results of focusing on my key 20% have changed my business and, just as important, the enjoyment I get from it. At TBB, we went from chasing people down for work to business coming to us. No magic. Just the result of shifting our focus to consistently and persistently delivering relevant value to

our most valued relationships, without asking anything in return and letting the rest take care of itself.

Ask any of the most successful business owners what has worked the most for them and I don't think anyone will tell you it was ACT!, Salesforce.com, or any other "ABC" sales process. Their careers (and lives) are built on the power of their relationships. 📖

PRACTICE DRILL



Focus on Your 20%

The choice is yours. If you enjoy tracking sales pipelines, opportunities, sales quotas, and "deals" then there are a ton of systems out there that fill the need and work quite well. If, on the other hand, you hate the idea of cold calling and prospecting, simply go to that address book and list out the 20% of your contacts who matter most. Do you know their interests? Their biggest dreams and goals (professional and personal)? If you don't then that is a place to begin. Once you do, mark down next to each name what specific actions you can take that will help that person realize those goals. What connections can you make for them? What knowledge can you transfer to them? Call them up. No agenda. No "asking for the business." Just deliver value relevant to them and keep doing it.

Remember, it takes twenty-one days to make a new habit so you need to push yourself at the start. Set aside ten to twenty minutes each day to do this outreach. After that, it becomes second nature and, dare we say it again, fun.



PAY FAST GET PAID FASTER

EVERYONE LOVES to talk about cash flow. Your CFO will work hard to cast a positive light on the bottom line on your profit and loss statement. You might engage in complex analyses of cash flow, amortization, counting your unpaid client invoices as an asset and ignoring the ones you have not paid yet. But before all that comes a more fundamental philosophy that sets everything else in the right direction: Pay fast. Get paid faster.

1. Repeat after me, “We are not a bank.”

I once had lunch with a gentleman who, at the time, was the CEO of one of the largest freight companies in the world. He had grown it to this position in roughly five years from a business that was similar in size to

my own. When I asked how he did it I was shocked at the simplicity of his answer. He took a look at a list of what his clients owed him and how long it was taking to get paid. He set out to visit each and every customer himself. He told them, “We are not a bank. If you want to continue to be our customer then you need to stop treating us like one. You certainly do not want to start paying us like one.” He was willing to lose a client if they didn’t value the relationship enough to pay promptly.

The result in this fundamental shift was a huge surge in cash in the bank (See “All truth is in the cash account”) that gave him the power and leverage to spend money on expansion, marketing, innovation, and acquiring other companies that were strapped for cash.

2. Pay fast.

It’s tempting to pat yourself on the back about how long you can string out paying bills or invoices. But if that is how you need to operate your business, then you already have some cracks in the foundation. Some truths:

- a. You want to be valued by the businesses that consider you their client.
- b. No matter how good a relationship is with your vendors, nothing will break it faster than you being a lousy payer.
- c. Every day you don’t pay that bill, you add stress to another business owner’s life and to his or her business.
- d. When you pay fast you become considerably more valuable as a client. Only good things come from that position.

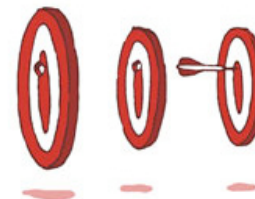
3. Get paid faster.

To make Step 1 really work for your business, you need to get paid even faster than you pay others. I have grown into a bit of a fanatic on this topic, with good reason. Nothing cramped my old freight business more than how long it took us to get paid by our clients. It caused us to consistently increase our borrowing from our banks, which grabbed focus from and added pressure to every other aspect of our business.

Use these principles with your customers and clients:

- a. Make it clear right at the start that you will run through walls for your clients, but they must pay you in a timely manner. Define what timely means to you.
- b. Send your bills out to clients right away. (I am amazed at how many vendors I have to ask to send me an invoice.)
- c. Be relentless about collecting the money that is due to you when it is due. The more you bend on this one, the farther down into the hole you will slide. “They are an important customer so it is ok” will not cut it. Want to appreciate your clients more? Work with clients that keep their word and do not take advantage of you.

Add these principles to your business plan, projections, VC presentations, and key goals for the year. Most importantly, drive it into the core of your business. The results will be found in your bank account. 📌



ACCELERATE THROUGH THE FINISH LINE

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TANGIBLE AND MEASURABLE RESULTS. Everyone wants them and everyone promises new and fancy ways to deliver them. Yet tangible and measurable results happen so seldom that they remain the Holy Grail for any business and its owner. Examples:

- a. You put in that new software system but your staff is not using all the productivity tools that made you buy it in the first place.
- b. You launched a new website but it is not contributing to your business goals.
- c. You promoted a new product or brand message and it did not take hold across the company or in your market.
- d. You created this year’s plan to include more innovation and then... nothing.

Sprinters and runners are taught early on that they are to imagine the actual finish line five steps beyond where it actually is so they accelerate through the finish line. The same is true for business results. **We are not getting the results we want because we are thinking about the finish line in the wrong place.**

From my own experiences, and from what I witness with clients, the problem arises from very little planning about what comes right after “done.”

What would happen if you mapped out, from the start of every initiative or project, five more steps that needed to be done beyond the obvious finish line? Five ways to promote the website in the first three months after launch. Five weeks of planned out promotion of that new product. Five things you were going to do after the big annual meeting to demonstrate your focus on innovation. A two-month plan to make sure everyone is really using the new technology tools you implemented. Five things your company can do after you landed that big client to make sure you deliver on everything you promised.

Results are what move the business up to its next level of growth. Getting things to “done” has merely become the equivalent of treading water. It may keep everyone busy, but it just moves you from project to project. Accelerating through the finish line gets past “done” and creates a way to realize the true business impact you are after. 🏈

PRACTICE DRILL



Five Steps Past “Done”

What initiatives have you implemented that delivered bottom line results way below expectations? Write them down on the left column of a notebook. Then consider five more steps after the original finish line for each one and write those down. Focus on developing each step that could lead to your cash account next time.



FIT YOUR BUSINESS ON A SINGLE PAGE

“POWER IS NOTHING WITHOUT CONTROL.” That declaration from Pirelli may be my all-time favorite advertising tagline.

It was a hit for Pirelli’s high performance tires years ago but comes into my mind in so many diverse situations. Businesses that harness their power control their future and, surprise, are more fun to run. In true Brickyard style, there is one core essential every business owner needs to feel in control: a single piece of paper that tells you the key pieces of information about how your business is doing.

Most business owners I meet are either overloaded with reports, have the wrong reports, work from data that is way too old, or have very little data. You need information systems in place, and

they need to deliver information that allows you to get a daily snapshot of the business. **At the end of every day, you should be able to scan a simple 8½ × 11-inch piece of paper and know exactly how your business is doing.** Once I put this in place in my business, I was able to leave the office each night and know how much we billed out, how much we collected, and how many transactions we processed. The kind of data that is critical may differ from business to business (although not as much as you may think), but the end result is the same. I knew how we were doing in seconds and I knew it in real time on a daily basis.

Think it only works for small companies? A few years ago I had the pleasure of hearing General Electric CEO Jeffrey Immelt speak. When asked how he keeps track of one of the largest companies in the world, he replied (in essence): “I can go back to my hotel tonight and see how the entire company performed today from one screen. If anything is outside the norms I set, I can inquire further. But I always know how we are doing around the globe from that one screen.”

Think Immelt spends a lot of time at his desk? Hardly ever. Think he knows how his company is performing? Yep. In real time at any time. That is power and control. 📄



PRACTICE DRILL

Your One-Page Snapshot

The hardest part is deciding what goes on that one page. The process of thoughtful reduction here is a good exercise unto itself. Start by writing down every single thing you ask about, run reports for, or want to know about your business. For this stage, more is more.

Next, highlight:

1. Data that ensures there is enough money in the cash account.
2. Data which ensures your innovation initiatives are moving along.
3. Any sales below a pre-set profit margin.
4. A measurement of the unit that generates income for your business. If you sell tires, how many tires did you sell? If you are a law firm, how many hours did you bill?

Then, compare these numbers to the previous month and year so you can spot trends. Finally, make it your own. This is your daily scorecard. Remember, this is about delivering power from control.



ESCAPE DESK GRAVITY

EVER NOTICE HOW great things happen every time you peel yourself away from your desk and meet with clients, prospects, or partners? But how often do you feel able to do it?

Like many business owners, my office has become a place to push paper and, more often than not, a place where I get in the way of people doing their jobs and delivering their best results. So unless you personally generate revenue or income from pushing paper (and let's hope you don't generate any from getting in people's way), consider for a moment that the bulk of your time is not best spent in the office.

More as a goal than a rule, what if you spent half your time out of the office? If that sounds scary,

“I have a *religious budget on my time,” says Steve Ballmer, CEO of Microsoft. Part of the religion is spending time with customers, about a third of his schedule. “I get energy from seeing our customers,” Mr. Ballmer explains. “It reminds me of the things we’re doing well and it also reminds me of the things where we need to improve.”*

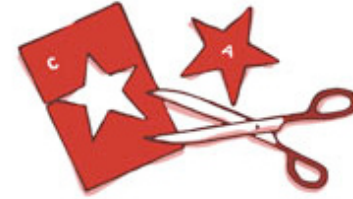
unrealistic or disconnected, then it means it’s a good start.

The biggest excuse we have for being in the office so much is the old “It won’t get done right if I am not here.” Consider that this may be one of those false stories you tell yourself. If it is a true story, then you either need to hire better people or focus on empowering those you trust to do more.

Entrepreneurs are not wired to focus on the details of paperwork and day-to-day tasks, which is only appropriate. Entrepreneurs are big picture, idea people. Fortunately, there are plenty of people who are detail-oriented and derive tremendous satisfaction from that kind of work. If you take the time to learn about how each person in your organization is wired, finding the best role for each of them becomes a lot easier. When you put people into jobs they instinctively are great at and love doing, you unlock fresh reserves of power within your business. (A great place to start is by having your employees take the Kolbe natural abilities test, available at www.kolbe.com.)

With your team now in their best places and your one-page scorecard tucked in your pocket, it is time to pull the parachute on that desk. Nobody spots opportunities or make decisions on the fly like a business owner does. Nobody else has the edge of being the owner, president, or CEO at a meeting with a client, prospect, or partner other than you. The best way to stay in touch with your business and its purpose is to talk to the customers and prospects in your market.

Working at your desk connects you every moment of every day to that ugly feeling of working in your business instead of working on it. Connecting with customers face-to-face is invaluable—it is what business owners do instinctively at the start until they get pulled to their desks by the gravity of growth and complexity. Want to keep the fire of that startup business alive? Fight desk gravity. 📄



DEFINE YOUR BUSINESS WITH NO

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GROWTH FOR TODAY is often defined by saying yes to everything and anybody. But building a company that endures and holds true to its purpose is defined by what a business owner says “no” to.

When you make an integrity-compromising concession to a client or tolerate bad behavior or poor payment patterns, you dishonor your purpose, your people, your business, and yourself. Before you know it, you wind up with customers who do not care as much as they should about your people, your product, or your service. Your best customers get buried under the ones who are causing you pain.

There is another way. When you follow the other concepts in the Brickyard you, by definition, allow

yourself the cash flow and foundation to do what too many companies do not do: say no to a new piece of business. You give yourself the chance to decide if a new piece of business fits with your purpose, honors your people, and will allow you to do amazing work. If it does not, then the best (and, admittedly, the hardest) thing to do is to say no.

It bears repeating: Your business, what it means to you, how you feel running it every day, and how your team thinks of it will be defined by the clients you say no to.

In the past I've had "A-List" clients and "C-List" clients. I thought I needed both in order to cover our overhead. The supposed strategy was to get enough A-List clients so we could fire the C-List clients and *then* the business would be fun.

Mistake.

I always regretted not making the hard choice to make the overhead fit into a business filled with only the A-List clients. Not easy to do by any means. I got there in the end, but like they say, education is expensive. Straddling the fence until the future arrives simply doesn't work. 📖

PRACTICE DRILL



Rank Your Clients

Get a list of your clients and decide which ones drain energy from the business and which ones add energy. Consider what, if anything, could be done to change the dynamic with those "C-list" clients and have that tough talk with each one. Now consider what the business (and cash account) will look like without the C-list. Start to make decisions based on the long-term prosperity of your business and the clients who truly appreciate what you do.



GOAL JUMPING

THIS BOOK will have done nothing if you don't walk away with measurable actions to make your business vision a reality. You create real actions by writing down formalized goals that *start* way in the future and work back to what you are going to do this week. I call it "goaljumping" and it is far from original. But since 97% of us never do it and it is such a perfect basic, goaljumping belongs in your Business Brickyard. It is incredibly powerful and super easy if you follow these simple guidelines:

1. Set aside a few hours every 90 days to work on your goals.

Creating goals that are truly important to you will not happen in a five-minute gap between calls or in

“A goal *without a plan* is only a wish.”

In a 1979 survey of one thousand graduating Harvard students, 84% of them had no particular defined goals, while 13% of them had goals, but did not write them down. Only 3% of the students had goals in writing. Ten years later, the same students were surveyed again. The 13% who had goals, but never wrote them down, earned, on average, twice as much as the students without any plan at all. The 3% who had written goals earned, on average, ten times more than the other 97%.

the midst of your daily routine. Goals also will do very little if they wind up in a drawer somewhere. Carve out some real time (at least two to three hours) away from any disturbances so you can think deeply about your key long, medium, and short-term goals for your business—and your life. Doing this with your team can be helpful, but I have found that there is no replacement for taking time to do this alone.

2. Work backwards.

Most people make their action plans starting with the present moment and working into the future. While this process sounds logical, it has some inherent problems. Your action plans will be encumbered by your current situation, staffing issues, money constraints, and the like. The goaljumping exercise I suggest has you first set your goals way out in the distance. I recommend picking a time frame that allows for real growth and achievement. Picture what your business looks like ten years from now. What has it accomplished? What does it look like? How many people? How many offices? How much profit will you make that year?

What would the business need to look like three years from now to be on track to realizing that long-term vision?

Next, write down what your business needs to look like in twelve months to be one third of the way to that three-year goal. Finally, write down what has to happen in the next ninety days so you are 25% of the way to that one-year goal.

3. Make your goals measurable.

As you set each goal, it is critical that each one can be measured. Some examples:

10 year	3 year	1 year	90 days
\$1,000,000 in net profit	\$200,000 in profit	\$70,000 in profit	\$20,000 in profit
5 books published	2 books published	Finish draft	Finish outline
5,000 sq. ft. dream home	Plan house addition	\$50,000 saved	Set up sav- ings account

You get the idea. What is critical is that you are not creating goals like “own a home,” “make more profit,” or “write a book.” Give yourself metrics that allow you to break your goals down into parts you can achieve... today.

4. Connect your goals to people who can help make them happen.

After each ninety-day goal, write down two extra pieces of information:

- Who will help you make it happen?
- When will it be done?

Once the goals are set, goaljumping is no fun alone. Finding the people who will help you realize these short-term goals will immediately energize your plan.

When I take the time to work through my plan every ninety days, I gain a greater sense of control and clarity. I know where I am going and what the

important things are to get done now. I have created a planner system that can help you format these goals—download it for free at www.businessbrickyards.com. But remember, in true Brickyard fashion, a blank piece of paper with columns across the top titled *10 years*, *3 years*, *1 year*, and *90 days* will work just as well.

Goaljumping is simple, and, as I hope I have started to convince you, simple works. Nobody leaves a Brickyard workshop without this exercise in their hands. It clears the clutter of complexity like nothing else. 📖

PRACTICE DRILL



Start Goaljumping

Set four dates in your calendar today. One in the next few weeks for your first two- to three-hour goaljumping session and then one every 90 days after that. Each time you do a goaljumping session, reset your **10-year**, **3-year**, **1-year** and **90-day** goals. Some goals will change completely and some will evolve.

Envisioning your business ten years from now, or trying to imagine the specifics of your life one decade in the future may be hard to pinpoint at first (at least it was for me). Don't panic. It's merely the clutter of where you are today blurring your view. Keep at it.

Another note: When I find my business getting away from me a bit, I will stop and do the goaljumping exercise even if it's only been forty days since the last time. Just remember to start in the future, work backwards, and keep it real and measurable. Don't forget the "who" of who's going to help you or the "when" of when the items in the next ninety days will get done.

Pre-game pep talk

85% OF EVERY BUSINESS IS THE SAME.

Any time someone used to try to help me with my business I would always start off with “Our business is different. We’re unique.” Turns out everyone says that. Also turns out that 85% of every business is exactly the same. At their core, businesses have customers, hire people, create a product or service, pay bills, and collect invoices. It is the remaining 15% that makes each business different and unique. So the question really is, “How can I spend most of my time on that 15%?”

The Business Brickyard is about getting the 85% so incredibly right, locked in, and perfect that you can truly focus your energy and passion on turning the remaining 15% into something truly extraordinary. Great businesses, like the greatest teams, focus on perfect fundamentals and win consistently year in and year out. Some years a great business might have better players than other years, but the basics, executed with perfection, always make them a contender.

If you know what your ideal clients really want, what is truly meaningful to them, and you deliver that to them perfectly—then suddenly, there is no

competition. Other people’s prices, other people’s products—they don’t matter. What does matter is the people you care about and how you do your job of looking after them better than anyone else can.

You don’t need to be the next Microsoft. You don’t need to find a cure for cancer. You don’t need to borrow millions of venture capital dollars with the hope to pay it back once you hit 100,000,000 in sales or registered users. Every business has a meaningful reason for being if they take the time to find it *and* hold on to it. **Grow a solid, strong and sustainable business that takes care of its owners, staff, community, and clients and you have a superior result. Anything more is just vanity and needless suffering.**

The journey of owning your business should be fun. Believe. Innovate. Be unique. Don’t spend forever on the dreaming part, just start doing it. Make it fill up your cash account. Enjoy the whole experience.

The Brickyard allows you to take the uncertainty out of the basics so you can focus on the parts you love. The 85% is the secret basics of business. The basics of business are classic. And classic is classic for a reason.

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By the way, my college football team that spent all that time after their loss catching bricks? They won the next week. But you knew that by now.

Bricks in brief

1. Reconnect with your purpose.

Your purpose will power your business when it lives at the intersection of what you truly do better than anyone else and what your clients and market truly care about.

2. All truth is in the cash account.

The best way to stay in control of your business is to start by spending less than you take in. Only count what is in the bank, not what may be coming in “If...”

3. Find your true story.

Only when we are honest with ourselves about why business is not as good as it could be and why we lost/didn't win new business we can take the right corrective action.

4. Lose your nemesis.

Focus on your clients, not on your competition. Your competitors have never paid your bills and they never will.

5. Singles and doubles.

Don't bet your business on the illusive home run. Instead, focus on a steady diet of disciplined, creative and innovative improvements.

6. Relationships, not sales.

Personal relationships power your business and the best business relationships are personal.

7. Pay fast. Get paid even faster.

When you pay fast you become considerably more valuable as a client. Unless you make money on money, you are not a bank and neither are your vendors.

8. Accelerate through the finish line.

Get past “done” to real results. From the start of every initiative or project, map out five more steps that need to be done beyond the obvious finish line.

9. Fit your business on a single page.

At the end of every day, you should be able to scan a simple 8½ × 11-inch piece of paper and know exactly how your business is doing.

10. Escape desk gravity.

Connect with your customers face-to-face. That's what business owners do best before they get pulled to their desks by the gravity of growth and complexity.

11. Define your business with “no.”

Focus your attention on the clients who truly appreciate what you do, and on saying “no” to the ones who don't.

12. Goaljumping.

Write down formalized goals that start way in the future and work back to real actions you can do today to get there.

About the Author

Howard Mann is the president of The Business Brickyard, a leading strategy, marketing and communication consultancy based in New York, and a founder of Sideshow Digital, an award-winning interactive agency.

Prior to founding The Business Brickyard in 2001, Mann was the president of a premier customs broker and international freight forwarder with six U.S. offices and a network of over thirty-five agents worldwide.

Mann currently works as an adviser to entrepreneurs and business owners. His highly focused workshops, dubbed “A Day in the Brickyard,” help executive teams dig down to unlock the power of the perfect execution of the basics of business. His clients learn how to build brick-solid foundations that sustain growth and make their businesses more fun to run. In addition to consulting, Mann speaks and writes frequently about the importance of the basics and of reconnecting to the passion that too often gets lost as businesses mature.