



SPIRIT OF THE ENTREPRENEUR

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WELCOME TO THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF BUSINESS!

A famous advertising man once wrote: “Advertising is the most fun you can have with your pants on.” I spent many years in the ad industry, and it is fun. But so is business in most industries.

Creating new products and services stretches the imagination beyond belief. Capturing and keeping customers is a wonderful challenge. Few things beat getting up in the morning and thinking about how you’re going to sharpen your competitive edge that day. Working with people is an adventure in learning and growth. Getting to grips with new technology is an extraordinary test.

This is an age of growing anxiety inside organizations. Waves of restructuring, reorganizing, downsizing, and retrenchment make corporate life daunting and dangerous. But this is also the age of the entrepreneur. A time when ideas matter—and when *everyone’s* ideas count. So for all the uncertainties and hassles and threats, this is also a time of unprecedented opportunity.

Today, virtually *anything* is possible.

Today, virtually *anyone* can become rich and famous.

Today, you can do more, faster, than at any time in history.

The world is what we choose to make it.

Hopefully, this booklet will help you reach your dreams. But don’t put it under your pillow and expect the ideas to be in your head in the morning. Think about them. Share them with your family, friends, and business associates. Argue about them.

But above all, please, please, please, *do* something about them.

I’ve crammed a lot into these pages. The ideas apply as much to small organizations as to large ones. You should be able to read about them in 30 minutes or less. That leaves you plenty of time to act.

So get out there and have a ball!

TONY MANNING

BACK TO THE REAL BASICS

If you don't make a difference—and this applies to individuals as well as to companies and their products—you don't matter. You'll never appear on your customer's radar screen; or if you do, it'll be for a short time only.

To find a place in your customer's cluttered mind, your offering must matter to him or her. It must add value to their lives. They must be better off for buying it—and worse off if they don't.

If you can't spell out your business idea quickly and clearly, you won't sell it—not to investors, not to suppliers, not to staff, and definitely not to customers. And if they don't buy, you're bust.

Business gets complicated faster than you imagine. Keep things simple. Strip them down to their essentials. Keep “to do” lists short. Let go of yesterday's problems.

Spend a lot of time defining your priorities. You'll waste less time later on activities and people with low pay-off.

Beware of offering the rights answer to the wrong problem. Start by defining the problem. It's the only way to be sure your solution matters.

“What is the question?” That's the first question when you face a problem. It's often the hardest question. Ask it when you go into a meeting or get into an argument. Don't let people skip it or skirt it. Insist on an answer before you move ahead.

Another question to ask is, “Why?” followed by “Why?” ... “Why?” ... “Why?” ... “Why?” The Japanese have long known the value in the “five why's” but most of us race ahead to get busy with *what* and *how*. Instead of probing past what's superficial and obvious to pinpoint what's really at issue, we set off in the wrong direction as quickly as possible. Why?

Junk begets junk. Lousy ideas spawn other lousy ideas. Quality in the few key things leads to quality in everything. Put your finger on the few things that matter, and you'll make the difference that matters.

Waste comes with a cost. Too many people in too many companies spend too much time doing the wrong things the wrong way. Finding a better way is important. But it's even more important to make sure you're focused on doing *the right things*.

You don't have to have the best ideas first. But you should aim to *implement* them best—and fastest. And then to improve them ahead of the pack.

Every idea has a shelf life. If you spend too long trying to perfect your breakthrough, you'll surely be pipped by a competitor who gets there first.

Speed gets you to the finish line first. Cut the time it takes to do everything. Imagine the impact on your bottom line if every meeting, every letter, every decision took half the usual time. Imagine the impact on your cash flow if your debtors all paid in half the time. Imagine the impact you'd make on customers if every proposal, every service call, and every delivery took half the time.

The two most important words in business are “critical mass”. People succeed when they apply a critical mass of time, energy, imagination, or money to a task; and a critical mass of reward makes it worth the effort. The same thing applies to every business. Companies sink when they fail to capture and keep a critical mass of customers. They don’t attract customers without applying a critical mass of resource.

In business—as in life—most things take longer than you think. It’ll take you longer to get your product or service just right, longer to get that first sale, longer to get the cash. So while it’s important to set tight deadlines, beware of assuming that events will fit your plan.

Most firms pay a lot of attention to the “what” and the “how” but too little to the “why.” But in a crunch, it’s probably your philosophies that’ll give you the edge. So think about the deepest beliefs that guide your business behaviour. Ask: What do we really mean by “service” ... “guarantee” ... “excellence” ... “commitment?” How do we demonstrate that people really are “our most important resource?”

STRATEGY

There are more notions about business strategy than any manager needs to know. Keeping up with the trends is a full-time occupation. But when you cut the bullshit and get down to basics, strategy must help you do two things:

1. Identify tomorrow’s opportunities.
2. Get a critical mass of stakeholders to “vote” for you.

No matter how big or small your firm may be, you have to pick a path into the future or you won’t have any control over the future. You may make progress, but not necessarily in a direction that suits you. But picking a direction is not enough. Many people have grand plans that they never pull off. So you also have to win the help and support of others—financiers, partners, employees, suppliers, or whomever.

The First Principles of Business Competition are quite clear—and violated all the time. They apply to every company in every industry. Here they are:

1. If you don’t make a difference, you don’t matter.
2. You can’t make a difference to everyone.
3. You have to keep moving and improving.

Most of the models, checklists, and frameworks that managers use are optional. You can choose whether to go with them or not. If you don’t like one, there are others that will certainly help you. But the First Principles are mandatory. You ignore them at your peril. You won’t stay in business for long if you are unfocused, or if you don’t add value or hold down your costs. The trouble is, most—or all—of your competitors are likely to work this out sooner or later. Then, when you’re all playing by the same rules, you need something else to give you an advantage. And that something is *the human factor*.

In the past, strategy could be about *positioning*—finding a unique customer or delivering unique value. But that gets harder to do. In the Information Age, competitors see the same opportunities almost immediately. Every market niche is quickly jammed with options that confuse customers and turn unique products into commodities. Customers know that they’ll have many choices, and that shopping around pays. So how do you stay ahead? By working hard to make your offering different, but then by honing your *execution*—how you deliver.

You have to be quicker, slicker, faster, more convenient. By being more adaptive than your competitors, more accommodating—and yes, more polite and charming—you gain the edge.

Strategy is change management. There is no such thing as a durable static advantage. Even the most brilliant first move must be followed by others. So even while you plan your first move, think about the move after next. And the one after that. And *how* you'll make them.

Imagine the future. Conjure up as many “what ifs” as you can. Colour them with information about political, social, and economic trends; customer buying behaviour; advances in technology; and competitor activities. Open your mind to possibilities. This mental exercise not only prepares you to deal with surprises, it also triggers ideas for immediate use. And it's what you *do* today that shapes tomorrow.

To be successful, every company has to do many things. But “interventionitis” causes awful problems. Each new activity—total quality management, reengineering, empowerment, or whatever—takes time and attention. And the more distractions you provide, the more confusion and waste you'll cause. Even worse, you'll kill trust, and that's the biggest cost of all.

BUSINESS PLANS

Start-up enterprises may need a business plan to show bankers or other supporters that they've thought about where they're going. Established firms generally waste their time writing plans. They spend too long at it, they don't have an effective process for doing it, and they quickly shelve their thoughts and get back to “real work.”

Planning is a valuable thinking exercise for every organization. But to make it worthwhile, remember that it's about *thinking*. It isn't about slavishly following a formula, filling in forms, or developing a budget. If at the end of it all you don't see the world through new eyes, you've wasted your time.

If everything around you is changing, surely you should change *the way you think about strategy*. After all, the concepts, models, and frameworks that were developed ten or twenty years ago were designed for a different time. The conditions that prevailed back then are history. Now, you need a new way to plan—one that's appropriate for today's conditions. It should take into account the turbulence of surprise of the outside world, and the complexities of life inside your organization. It should help you learn. It should expose old fallacies and new possibilities. And above all, it should lead rapidly to *action*.

Managers usually start planning with a review of where they are. They look back at last year's budget and actual performance, at current strengths and weaknesses, and at the environmental trends that are clearest—in other words, *closest*. This focus on the past and the present makes the future all but invisible. But the future is where you'll spend your time. So that's where your mind should go.

Anyone who backs you wants to know about your *potential*—in other words, what you might achieve given your best chance. Your past might provide some clues; but it never tells the whole story. It's your un-lived future that matters. You have to paint a compelling picture to make it clear. That old adage, “Sell the sizzle, not the steak,” holds the key.

The people who get your plan want to know you've covered all the bases. But they also want to get your point. And the best place to make it is right up front—on Page 1. Just a few lines that say it all: Why. How. When. How much. The briefer the better. Detail can come later.

PERSONAL

You are a precious resource. You have limited time and energy, and lots to do. Make sure you save yourself for what really matters. Apply yourself to the few things that make the big difference. Beware of doing too little about too much.

Most of us face too many opportunities. Life demands hard choices. You can't do everything. You can't always have things your way. You have to pick your opportunities, place bets—and make sacrifices. When you choose one course, you forego others. You may be sorry later, but you'll be sorrier if you don't decide.

The only opportunities that pay off are those you do something about.

You can do anything. And that's the trouble. You only matter when you turn possibilities into realities.

Life is a test. You pass it one day at a time. But best you prepare early, rather than try to cram everything into the last few minutes.

What happened yesterday is history. No matter how glad or sad you feel about it, it's over. Now, you have to think about what's ahead. You have to move on.

Integrity means not cheating others. It also means being true to yourself. You can only be you. And you'll accomplish more by trying to be the best *you* possible, than by trying to be someone else. You're an original. Don't waste time trying to be a copy!

Life is a balancing act. We all have to juggle work, health, learning, family, spiritual, and community matters. Being single-minded about your goals is absolutely essential if you're to reach them. But the most successful people are often those with the most commitments. They know that it pays to have many interests; to work hard but also to invest in their mental and physical health; to devote themselves to their companies, but also to their loved ones; to enjoy hobbies, to take breaks, to contribute to the greater good. Think about this when you make your plans. And plan for a balanced life.

GETTING STARTED

If you're not serious about being seriously different and better than your competition, you'll never succeed. It takes a critical mass of *commitment* to be a winner.

To be an entrepreneur, you don't have to be a risk-taker. On the contrary, studies show that successful entrepreneurs are often quite cautious and conservative. But they have the guts to go with their dreams. They think through what they must do. They advance methodically. And when luck comes, they seize it and use it. Entrepreneurs are mostly quite ordinary people. There's an entrepreneurial spirit in every one of us. All that's missing is the spark.

Business is tough. Things go wrong. People let you down. Technology fails. Competitors eat your lunch. So to be successful, you have to be able to ride the changes and rise to the challenges. Bottom line: you have to be really, really, really, really sure you want to be in the business game.

Support from those close to you—family and friends—is key to making over the rough patches. If they don't stand by you when you need them there, the load will be unbearable. The surest way to win them to your way of thinking is to give them the facts they need to see your point of view. But even then, you may have to go it alone. Everyone may not share your vision.

Dare to dream. And do what it takes to realise your dreams. Most people on this planet never discover their true potential. They too easily buy others' opinions of what's possible. They sink into a sump of safety. They stay with what "everyone knows" is possible. They waste their God-given gift of creativity, and they never experience the adventure, the wonder, the excitement, the adrenaline rush—or those cold sweats in the middle of the night—that come with doing your own thing.

The world is shaped by people who foolishly think they know best.

You don't have to fit in. you don't have to conform. You don't have to go with the herd. In fact, it's best that you go your own way.

Once, not long ago, today's most exciting products didn't exist. But thankfully there were people out there who saw opportunities and had the guts to do something about them. At the time, they were probably put down by the sceptics. Likely as not, they struggled for finance and fought hard for their first customers. And chances are, they got little help along the way. But the risks they took changed our lives. Thankfully.

Forget about going with the flow. Downstream isn't the place to go.

One of the most dangerous paradoxes in business is the fact that growth is good—but within limits. More firms die because they run out of money than for any other reason. And the faster you grow, the more money you'll need. So beware of over-ambition. Success can be a killer when it costs too much, too fast.

MANAGING PEOPLE

Sooner or later, growing businesses need more than just the founder's inputs. Sooner or later, the founder has to let go of some key responsibilities. Hanging on too long can be the kiss of death. Ask: where are we on our life cycle now? Are the best people still making the big decisions? What should we let go? What new talent do we need?

If the people who work for you don't do things the way you want them to, there are several possibilities: 1) they don't understand what you expect; 2) they don't have the necessary skills; 3) they're not motivated; 4) they know a better way. So while it's critical that you make your expectations clear, it's even more important that you think through those expectations, and make sure they matter. Then, that you equip your people to meet them, and reward them for doing so.

Are your people *conscripts* ... or *volunteers*? The first come to work and do what you expect. The second constantly exceed your expectations. Conscripts work because they must. For them, it's a game to see how little they can do and how much they can take. Volunteers work because they want to. They see getting as a by-product of giving.

Pay may persuade people to become volunteers. But the best incentive is respect. When people know they matter, they act as if they matter.

It's easy to make people feel important—and that's where most motivation stops. But exceptional performance comes when you *make them important*—and that's far harder. To make someone feel important, you can simply pat them on the back, say “thank you,” or give them a small award or promotion. To make them important, you have to give them information, resources, support, and responsibility. You have to make them matter. And that's always risky and uncomfortable.

If you're not into exploiting child labour, why treat adults like children? The people who work for you make life and death decisions for themselves and their families. They make hard choices about how to care for their dependants; how and where to save or spend; where to live; how to stay healthy; and even who should govern the country. But when they come to work, they might not be allowed to buy a pencil without permission. Little wonder they act so stupid!

What you expect from people is what you get. Expect them to fly, and they will; expect them to fail and they will seldom let you down.

Why should anyone care about your business as much as you do? Only because they feel a sense of *ownership*. Give them that, and they'll give you everything. Deny it, and they'll take you for everything.

Trust is the most precious resource in business. It lets you set people free to be their best. It allows you to share ideas—and get better ones back. It turns information into inspiration. It converts customers into friends, suppliers into partners, and your people into geniuses. But you don't get it till you show it. And the more you give, the more you get.

Be polite. It costs nothing, but it sure is rewarding.

What's the value of a surprise? You can't put a number to it. It's easy to be predictable—so most people and most companies are. They're not a lot of fun. You forget them easily. There's no good reason to remember them. Instead of going out of your way to make work as ordinary as possible, look for ways to put a bit of zing into it. Try some kooky pictures on the walls ... spontaneous celebrations ... unplanned get-togethers to swap great ideas ... an unscheduled walkabout just to chat to your team.

Have a mid-year party (no one says you have to wait for Christmas!). Dish out some crazy awards. Do something—*anything*—unexpected, out of character, at the “wrong” time. You'll probably be surprised at the result.

If you want suggestions from your people, be sure to act when they speak up. Wherever possible, *act* on their ideas. At least have the decency to acknowledge their contribution. Say thank you. Let them know what you intend doing. (And if you're *not* going to use their input for any reason, tell them, and tell them why.) People are proud of their ideas. They feel good when they help. The way you respond sends a powerful signal about how much you value them. It either says, “You matter,” and ensures a flow of further suggestions ... or it shuts them off forever. Worse, by signalling “You don't matter,” it tells people what they may have suspected all along: that you are a cynical manipulator who doesn't respect them and can't be trusted.

Try “What do you think?” instead of “here's the plan.”

Sooner or later, people expect a payoff for making a difference. First give them respect, then give them money. Money without respect is too easy ... and it won't motivate anyone for long.

Empowerment is a wonderful idea and every company talks about it. But most people in most firms are deliberately and systematically *disempowered*. How? Simple—they're starved of information. They don't know what they need to know to be able to take responsibility. They might be given the narrow details of their specific jobs, but they seldom are fully informed about the *context* in which they must perform. If you don't tell them about your company strategy, your philosophies, and the challenges you face, they can't make sensible decisions. And they have to keep coming back to you to find out what they really can do.

Think of work as a conversation. Now ask what kind of conversation goes on in your organization. Is it "toxic"—exclusive, secretive, uninspiring, politicised, and negative? Or is it "nourishing"—inclusive, open and honest, motivating, exciting, positive? Quite clearly, the first leads to a vicious cycle of despair and destruction. The second fires people up and triggers a virtuous circle of creativity, co-operation, and exceptional performance.

CAPTURING AND KEEPING CUSTOMERS

Marketing is business. It's all about connecting with customers.

Customer service is not the responsibility of a person or a department. It's not something you can do from time to time. It is what business is all about. It's everybody's responsibility.

Point your whole organization at the customer. Let customers know you are *all* there for them. Make it easy for them to talk to anyone in your company. Make your people competent to talk sensibly to them.

Doing what customers expect is a sure way to bore them—and lose them.

Customers matter more than anything. Show them you know it. Remind them over and over. Try driving them crazy with attention. (It's a lot harder than you think!)

Capturing "enough" customers—a critical mass—is the first hurdle any new business faces. If you don't do it fast, you won't be able to fund your future. What does "critical mass" mean to your company?

Word of mouth recommendation is the most powerful promotion. What others say beats all the boasts you make about yourself. So give them great stuff to talk about. Make news. Surprise them in ways they won't forget.

Become indispensable. Most companies don't, so it's easy for customers to shop around. When you do weave yourself into your customer's life, they'll keep your competitors at bay.

Customers form their impressions of you in many ways. They try your product, they test your service, they flirt with your competitors. But while their buying decisions are shaped by many factors, often the final choice hinges on just one. It may be a product feature or its price; it may be the way one of your people treats them; it may be the efficiency of your accounting or distribution system. So to build a competitive advantage, start by charting *everything* that makes a difference to customers; then home in on the *one big difference*. Make that your property—and yours alone.

Business is a competition for the customer's imagination. If you don't light their fire, they won't light yours.

It's vital to "walk your talk". But it's equally important to "talk your walk". If you want customer service to be a reality in your firm, you have to make it your own priority. You can't just preach a gospel without living it. But you can only live what you are. So your messages must reflect your inner essence. If delivering it doesn't come easy, you'll soon find excuses for not doing it at all.

You cannot win an argument with a customer. When you try, the best you'll do is shut them up and send them away seething. Chances are, they'll never come back for another bout.

While you might love your point of view, all the customer cares about is her point of view. Push yours too aggressively, and you'll push your customer away. Instead, try to understand what's going on in the customer's mind, why she asks those "stupid" questions, and why she thinks your product is too expensive. Find out what she feels, and you have a chance of forging a relationship that'll work for both of you.

Selling is about *listening*, not *telling*. Turn off your slick sales pitch and tune in to the sound of your customer's feelings. Try asking questions rather than providing answers. What you'll learn will be worth far more than anything you might say.

Silence is golden. Shut up and let your customer speak first ... and last. No matter how strongly you feel, no matter how "right" you think you are, remember that the customer holds all the cards. When he thinks you understand, he'll understand. When he thinks you're out to win a point, he'll make sure you don't. He may not punish you right away, but he will punish you sooner or later.

It's more important to be a partner than an orator.

If you want to fascinate a customer, be fascinated by them. Fall in love with their problems. Become an expert on their industries. Learn everything you can about their challenges, the threats that face them, and their future strategies.

It doesn't matter what you think of your product or service. All that counts is what the customer thinks. The first hurdle is to get them to think about you at all. Then, to keep alive in their minds. You'll only do this if you let go of your point of view and learn to see things the way customers do.

All buying decisions are shaped by the customer's "Value Demand System"—demographic factors such as age, sex, and income; and "psychographic" factors such as their needs, wants, beliefs, and assumptions. Customers are also influenced by their competencies (what they can do for themselves); their options (how else they can satisfy themselves); and their resources (what they can afford). The better you understand your customer's world, the better you can tailor your offering.

To capture and keep customers, you have to tailor a "Value Delivery System" to meet their needs. It includes obvious things like your products, processes, and people, and less obvious things like your business philosophies. No matter how smart you are, your Value Delivery System can only do exactly the right things for a very narrow audience. You have to design it—and keep fine-tuning it—to keep customers happy.

IDEAS

Perhaps the most valuable competence we can develop, is what the Zen masters call “beginner’s mind.” If a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, a lot can be even worse. What we “know” gets in the way of discovery. We need to empty our minds to make space for new insights. As long as we cling to “the facts” and revere our experience, we will not see possibilities.

How many ideas did you have today that will actually affect how much money you make? How much time did you spend *thinking*? If you don’t set out deliberately to find new things to do, and new and better ways to do them, don’t be surprised if you seldom make breakthroughs. Thinking is work. Work at it.

How many ideas came from your people? How good were those ideas? Why weren’t there more? Why weren’t there more of a better quality? How do you encourage people to think constantly about what your company can do differently and better—and what else can you do?

Some ideas sneak up while you’re not looking. They arrive out of nowhere, and if you’re lucky, you’ll be able to write them down and act on them before they vanish again. So keep pen and paper handy, and make a habit of thinking about your thoughts. It’s no good waiting for inspiration if you’re not alert and ready to manage what comes.

The busier you get, the less time you’re likely to spend on creative thinking. It pays to constantly check that you’re doing what matters most. Be disciplined about your chores; but be equally disciplined about making and managing ideas.

Suggestion schemes fail because people quickly discover that no one cares about their suggestions. Too often, they volunteer ideas that *they* think are important, but which management ignores.

The best way to get ideas from people is to ask them daily: “What did you do differently and better today?” “What will you do differently and better tomorrow?” “How can I help you?” The personal touch works far better than any system or structured process.

INFORMATION & INSIGHTS

What you “know” can be an invaluable asset—or a crippling liability. It’s the stuff of your mental model, the prism through which you view the world, affecting the way you interpret things and how you respond to them. What “everyone knows” shapes the way an industry works. By challenging that conventional wisdom, you may see a way to do things that will let you break free of the pack. So make a point of doing it regularly and deliberately. List “the facts.” Then ask: “What can we turn on its head?” “What can we do that goes against the trend?” “How can we be heretical?”

The more you know about your customers, the more precisely you can tailor your offering for them. Every contact offers you a chance to learn something new. But you only learn if you *listen*.

Ask your next customer: “What do *you* think?” It’ll probably be the first time any vendor asked them that, so you’ll earn some respect. And what your customer tells you could be worth a great deal.

When customers complain, don’t argue. Thank them for their input. Ask what else you can do to make them happy. Share what they say around your firm. Paying attention is the surest way to defuse a tricky situation; by treating complaints as *advice*, you learn valuable stuff for free.

Valuable information is often free—and very easy to get. What’s it worth, for example, to know your customer’s name? Or details of her family ... her work ... her hobbies ... her hopes and dreams ... what she bought from you last week ... what she buys from others ...? Most firms never collect this stuff. Those that do, seldom use it. What a pity. What a waste!

Yesterday’s sale is a stepping stone to your next sale ... and the sale after next. But you need to know what happened to make new things happen. If you don’t capture enough data you’ll have an incomplete picture of the possibilities. If you can’t easily find the information you need, you won’t use it. Information is money: save it and keep it handy. Use it regularly. And keep it up to date.

Every day, the media offer useful clues about future trends. If you read newspapers carefully, you’ll find gems of information on almost every page. Magazine articles and radio and TV bulletins can give you the raw material you need to invent the future. But it’s too easy to let this useful stuff slip through the cracks. First, you have to notice it—and that takes time and attention. Then, you have to sort it, classify it, and save it where you can find it—and that takes discipline. But most important of all, you have to make connections between various bits of information—and that’s a *creative* activity.

Every person in your organization is potentially an information gatherer. But they’ll only be aware when they know it matters—and when they know *what* you need to know. And they’ll only come to you with information once, if you don’t show that you value their input.

Most people think they’re not creative. But they forget how incredibly creative they were as kids. And they don’t realise that creativity is simply the ability to take two or more items of information and link them to make something new. The starting point, of course, is to have the raw material you need to spark your imagination. So if you want to improve your creativity, start by grabbing every bit of information you can. Don’t just look for what seems relevant; the “irrelevant” stuff might be just what your mind needs to work with. Inspiration is all around you.

FINANCE

Build a war chest. You don’t know when you’ll need it, but sooner or later you will. You may need the extra funds to bale you out of trouble or to grab an opportunity. Having them when you need them can save you a trip to the bank or give you an edge of a competitor.

There are many sources of finance. Entrepreneurs often try to avoid giving away shares in their firms by borrowing from a bank. But research shows that this can be very costly. Companies that survive tend to seek funds by selling shares rather than taking loans. The lesson? Beware of being selfish. Tight control of ownership might not be the best way to fame and fortune.

Banks offer an increasing range of services to their business clients. Shop around. Treat your bankers as partners. Ask their advice. Keep them informed. When they know they're on your side, they can make a positive difference.

Extending credit can give you breathing space ... but it can also hurt you. Sooner or later, bills have to be paid. When you let the debts build up, the day of reckoning comes with a bang. Best work with your cash flow and pay as you go.

Beware of discounting yourself to death. It might seem like a good idea to cut prices once to win a sale. But in no time at all it can become a habit. When customers know you're an easy touch, they lean on you every time. And in no time at all, you can wind up giving away your profits ... and your future.

Discounts are an investment in tomorrow's sales and profits. But before you dish them out, ask whether it wouldn't be better to invest in a market research project, upgrade your computer system, send your people on a training course, or run a new ad campaign. All of these can lead to long-term sales. Discounts seldom do.

Collect what's owed to you. You are not a bank. Asking for money is not easy, and you may feel it'll chase customers away. But the real danger is not asking, and then watching helplessly when customers buy elsewhere. If asking for money is going to cost you their loyalty, best you discover it early—before it costs you your business.

Get all the credit you can. Build your credit rating by paying on time. You never know when you'll have to call for help. And if you have a reputation for meeting your debts, you'll have a better chance of getting extra time to meet a particular obligation.

Develop a relationship with your bank manager. Be open and honest about what you're doing. Share your plans, your dreams, your ambitions. Banks are increasingly customer-oriented and keen to serve their customers—and you're a customer.

PERSEVERANCE

Problems can stop you in your tracks, or teach you something and spur you to renewed efforts. The way you respond to them is a matter of choice. Before you decide to stumble and stop, consider another bold push forward.

Knowing when to give up is a sign of strength, not weakness. Giving up too soon is pathetic.

Sometimes, doing nothing is a good idea. But pick your times with care.

The best ideas in the world aren't with a thing if they don't lead to action.

One more try might be all you need. Try it!

ACTION

Doing beats talking.
Beware of confusing talk with work.

You can rely on some people to make great plans, talk of great visions, and give you great advice. They're useful. But the ones you really want are those rare birds who make things happen.

At the end of every day, ask, "What did I do today to make a difference ... to my job, my company, my family, my community, my country?" Most of us would probably write short lists. That's sad—and a challenge!

Opportunities are concepts. They might be exciting, but until you seize them and act on them, they're nothing.

Act. Now. Fast. Creatively. Assertively. Enthusiastically.

Doing is learning.