

P A R T

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# Take Responsibility

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## CHAPTER

## 1

# The Lesson of Learning

*“I used to think that in order to look like a successful businessperson you needed to sound like one. Now I know that in order to sound like one you need to first be one. And there is only one way to do that: Be open and show the humility to learn from any source you can.”*

**I** started in business completely by accident. It was late 1989, and I was driving in to work at the radio station for another early start to another 16-hour day.

My life was starting to feel like the movie *Groundhog Day*; 5 A.M. start, produce the breakfast show, produce and prerecord the morning team’s comedy segments for the next day’s show when they came off air at 9 A.M. until about 11 A.M., go to station meetings until midafternoon, inhale some food at my studio’s mixing console, pour more coffee down my throat in preparation for the second half of the day, stay locked in the darkness of the studio for another 10 hours before driving home sometime before midnight only to skull as many beers as I could in an hour before passing out on the couch, wake up at 2 A.M.

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with a headache, a kink in my neck, and a dead arm and decide to go to bed—and then get up two hours later to do it all again. (Isn't the media a sexy industry?)

This had been my day for three months straight. As I drove in that morning in darkness and silence, only one sentence slipped out of my mouth into the cool air: “*This just isn't fun anymore.*” I was not growing anymore; I was not going anywhere. There didn't seem to be any teachers or anything new to learn. And since the salary was terrible, there was no compensation on that front, either.

Radio had been such a great part of my life for years. I loved my time on the air in tropical North Queensland and the work-hard–play-hard approach we had. I loved my time in management. But *this* was not what I signed up for.

The station had gone through multiple owners in the course of only two years, and the most recent was the toughest. For some reason, my new program manager insisted on pushing the envelope, seemingly just for his own entertainment. He kept loading me up, and I kept taking it on in defiance. But that power play was getting old, and I realized that I'd had enough. It was time for me to start using my energy in a more positive way.

That morning, as the breakfast team came off the air and I had my first break for the day, I walked into my boss's office and announced the following: “I'm done! You've pushed me too far and for no reason. Clearly, you have someone else in mind for the job; let them have it, because I'm out.” And just like that, as if a whole block of my life never happened, my radio career came to an end within hours, and I was unemployed. I got home early that night, sat and watched the sun disappear into the horizon—and the bottle of rum with it—and thought to myself, “Hmmm, okay; so, well, that's done. What next?”

So I rang one of my business mentors, real estate guru Graham Hogg, and asked his advice. We decided it would be best to put my apartment up for sale, as the market was booming and it was a good time to be selling in my particular area. It

was time to cash in on the ride; so I did, and it was sold the next day.

I rang my mother and said, “I just sold my apartment . . . oh, yeah, and I quit my job on Friday.” There was a silence on the line and then the inevitable question: “So, what are you going to do now?” My very confident yet poorly thought-out response: “I think I’ll go buy a crappy house and renovate it, you know, see if I can cash in on the real estate boom for a little while and make some money. Wanna chip in? We’ll do it together, it’ll be fun!”

I thought to myself as I hung up the phone, “Okay, so not sure where that came from. But, let’s have a go. What’s the worst that can happen?”

And just like that, I was in business. My mother and I threw an equal amount of cash into an account, registered a business name—and then, as if it were our destiny, we were in the home renovation business with a company we named New Address.

A few weeks later, we bought a rundown, three-bedroom home in an outer city suburb. The walls looked like the previous owners had a budding graffiti artist in the family; the carpet had morphed from carpet with a bit of dog hair in it to a collection of dog hair with a hint of carpet color; the backyard appeared to be a great location for an episode of *Survivor*; the kitchen was something from a 1960s cereal commercial; and the bathroom looked like a film set for *Psycho Three: The Bathroom’s Revenge*. It was perfect!

My mother did all of the interior decorating and design, and I did the deals with the real estate agents, carpenters, landscape guys, flooring guys, and any other vendor—and away we went. One house led to two, two led to three, and three to four. We fixed them and flipped them as quickly as we could, sometimes fully renovating the property in only three weeks! We stumbled from one success to the next, not learning much from each of the experiences as we completed each one, since we didn’t really document any of the encounters, interactions, or events. It was all done on intuition and gut feel. We’d buy

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the worst house on the best street and make it look like it belonged.

I can recall one particular occasion where we settled on a property and said to the real estate agent, “Call me in four weeks; we’ll be done here.” After the fifth week, he pounded on the front door yelling, “You’ve listed the property with someone else?” I responded, “For sure! Actually, we’ve already sold it; we just haven’t had the time to put the sign up yet. I told you ring me in four weeks, and you didn’t.” He explained that he didn’t believe we’d really be done by then, and I just smiled as I shut the door and said, “Then maybe you better start listening to your clients. After all, I did say call me in four weeks, how quick a sale was that for him? You’d reckon the guy would have been back to me quicker than an Olympian on steroids. Nope!

I was having a blast. I’d get up at dawn, paint walls until midmorning, do some deals with vendors and agents till about lunchtime, set everyone up onsite for the afternoon and then head off to a late lunch with any of my mates who happened to have the day off. I’d get home sometime later that afternoon with a skin full of booze and continue painting into the night with many beers in hand and the stereo playing full blast. It was the perfect job; and I was perfectly oblivious to the real business implication of everything I did each day. I was simply earning more for doing less for the first time in my life—and I absolutely loved it!

That is, right up until I realized it was not a job but rather a *business* that I had; and I didn’t have the first clue about how to run a business.

I was walking down the beach with a mate of mine, relaying the events of the last six months in my newfound career. I gave him the following highlights:

- We’d traded a half dozen properties.
- We had five more under contract or in the pipeline.

- It seemed like we were making close to a 20 percent margin on each of the properties. (I didn't *really* know for sure; but that felt like the amount I should be making.) Aaaaannndddd our debt to equity ratio was well and truly outside of my comfort zone and climbing with each deal. That last bit got my attention. After all, until I quit my job, I had a \$45,000 mortgage on a dinky two-bedroom apartment, and a broken down MG convertible that was more of a pushcart than a sports car. Every time I got it to start I'd do a victory dance! Trading that many properties in quite a short period of time after such a simple existence represented a lot of money in the late 1980s in the middle of a recession.

As soon as these words came out of my mouth, I could almost feel the shiver come over my body—and I went a little quiet. This was the first time I realized that I had *no* idea what I was doing—and that I really didn't know anything about business, or life, for that matter.

This moment of self-realization was no surprise for my friend. He was years in front of me in business and personal development and no doubt had already experienced this scary epiphany some years earlier. While he was now accustomed to making million-dollar deals every other day, this was all new for me. I was silent as we walked down the beach. The shiver left my body, and I could feel my pulse quicken a little and my brain start to buzz a bit with too many thoughts colliding all at once. Clearly, I needed to develop a better strategy for running this new business of mine—or this would all fall down like the proverbial house of cards.

I must have gone a little pale after my information download as my friend quietly asked me with a slight smirk, "You alright?" To which I responded—in my best strategic fashion—"Let's find a bar!" I figured that today it was time for me to really open up to my friend and take as much away from this conversation, and his experience, as I could.

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The next few hours were good for me; they served as an early turning point in my business career. It was the first time that I think I truly *learned* anything about business. My father is a great businessman who had tried to help me understand business in the past. He had done a wonderful job of *encouraging* me to truly embrace what it meant to be in business for yourself; and if I had asked more questions or been more attentive, I surely would have learned more from him.

But this time, things were different. Now, I was *ready* to receive any information. Before today, I just figured I had to listen. I didn't have time for that business strategy stuff; I was more focused on *being* great instead of *learning how* to be great.

As I walked along the beach and reflected on my situation, I began to get angry with myself for failing to ask more questions or to listen more intently to my father almost a decade earlier. How much easier would this journey be had I done that simple thing? But I was young, proud, distracted, and a bit wet behind the ears. Now I was a decade behind where I should have been on my path to developing business smarts. Idiot!

I walked onto the beach that day as a fun-loving, self-employed bloke who thought, "How easy is this business stuff? Piece of cake—no problem!" I walked *off* the beach as a small business owner thinking, "I am dumb as dog shit. Wow—this could have ended really, *really* badly." I had clearly just received a dose of reality, and was about to learn some early lessons. It was time to get my very inexperienced head out of my very egotistical backside and actually begin to learn!

I spent the next few days grilling my friend on how he ran his business, how he planned, how he put money together so that it went in and out as it should and the cupboard was never bare. I learned how you could make money but still not *have* any money, how you could *get* money without having any money, and how you could end up without money if you did not watch the money you had closely.

It was fascinating and oh so frightening!

All of this information was so significant in that it was the first time I realized just how much responsibility I had: far more than I did as a manager and employee, even though I had run teams of up to 15 people and budgets well in excess of the property value I was trading. This new venture was totally *my* responsibility, my win—or my loss. It was time for me to stop acting like the young gun businessperson I *thought* I was and truly understand the young naive businessperson I *really* was.

And all of a sudden I was back at work full-time without a clue what I was doing or what my job really was.

I jammed as much information into my head as I could over the next few weeks. I read books, talked to people, and attended seminars—all in an effort to figure out what I should be doing and what I was currently doing wrong, or, through sheer luck, sometimes right.

Back then, I used to think that in order to look like a successful businessperson, you needed to sound like one. Now I know that in order to sound like one you need to first *be* one. And there is only one way to do that: Be open and show the humility to learn from any source you can.

And, lucky for me, that was my very first lesson.

It's been some 20 years—and 10 more companies that I have owned—since I received this brick to the head. I now know that learning does not come from a single place, person, source, or nugget of information. It is the cumulative effect of your ability to tap into all of the information you receive on a daily basis and to identify and be aware of the knowledge that each of these pieces of information offers you.

For many years, I have spoken at conferences all over the world—in 16 different countries at hundreds of engagements. And the common denominator at all of these events is that so many people in the audience are looking for the “one thing” to make life easy. They don't necessarily want to *learn*; they just want the *answer*. They're seeking a magic bullet—a key to life, the universe, and business success. They wait for the goose

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to arrive that will lay the proverbial golden egg. They sit at attention, pens in hand, looking up at the guy on stage.

I can almost hear their brains ticking, and I can read the same thing over and over in their eyes. “Go on, bald man; show us what you’ve got. Tell me how you’re going to make it easy for me; give it your best shot. Impress me—give me the answers.” I know that’s what they’re thinking, because that’s what *I* thought during my early years in business as an attendee at such conferences.

They sit in silence in the audience waiting, waiting, waiting, for the explanation that will take away the hard work and make it easy for them to make a buck and lead them to success.

Well, the sad news is such a magic bullet just doesn’t exist.

More important, what everyone seems to be seeking is not external. It’s not something you can touch, hold, shift, or own.

It is something you feel, something you represent, something that is rooted in your core beliefs. And it starts with your ability to get back to a sense of personal reality and truth. If you can discover your most basic truth, you can break down some of the existing beliefs that are holding you back—and develop new ones that will set you on the path to a more purposeful future.

As a consultant, one thing that consistently blows me away is how totally crazy businesspeople are. They hire consultants, buy books, read magazines, subscribe to newsletters, attend conferences, study, ask questions, network, and do their genuine best to gather as much information about business as they can. (Much like you, too, are doing right now by reading this book.) But somewhere between this page and the back cover, all of the great information they have absorbed will be lost as they discard it with their fear-based business beliefs and throw it in the bin.

Why would they do that? And why would you do that?

It typically happens because you are trapped in very basic, fear-based beliefs that stop you from *really* learning. You

usually come to hold these beliefs as a by-product of the unreal business environment in which we all work. Our peers, leaders, associates, and any others that have preceded us in the business world introduced them to us, and we all bought into the way *they believe* it to be. We aren't *born* with beliefs, after all; we inherit them or create them as we make our way through life. So your first challenge is to break down some of the beliefs that are bad for you.

I have honed in on four core fear-based beliefs that you need to eliminate from your thought process if you are to learn anything—and you need to do that today!

1. You don't think you have enough *time* to learn or to change anything in your life; essentially, you're too busy being busy to implement some of the lessons you've learned. You're too frazzled to stop and think; instead, you make do with what you have, and every day is Groundhog Day. You pray for every day to be easier, better, faster, more fun, more rewarding; yet, every day you fail to make the time to change anything. Then you wonder why the next day you wake up feeling the same way and launch yourself onto the same treadmill.
2. You believe that while the things you have learned and the information you have gathered may be interesting, the situation is *different* in your life, your business, your area, your country, your category. This belief prompts you to discard this information and convince yourself that any application of it in your special circumstance simply won't work for you.
3. You think that you know what you are doing, when, in actual fact, you are simply too afraid to *ask* for help. As a result, you run your business on ego rather than ability. You might not *think* you are doing that, but wouldn't you be more open to accepting some of these new lessons if you weren't?

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Ego is driven by ignorance, arrogance, and fear. Ability is driven by humility, reality, and truth.

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There are really only two decisions you can make in business: one is based on truth, the other on fear. If your ego does not permit you to make or admit a mistake, instead blaming others or other circumstances for your lot in life, you have chosen fear as your partner in business.

4. You *believe* you know where you are going, but you lack *vision*, and therefore purpose. So many of us get into a business without any clue about what to do next. We sometimes write extensive business plans and then fail to refer to these plans for guidance. We engage business leaders and coaches for help in the creation of a vision or plan for the business and don't bother to listen to their advice. We post things on the walls of our offices to help us visualize what we want out of life, but we don't really know *why* we want those things—other than the fact that society has implied that they represent success. Worse still, we often do not have the vision to understand when our business journey is finished. We have no idea when or where we should get off.

If purpose is your ultimate goal, then vision allows you the clarity of the future to see how you are going to achieve your goal.

Can you put your hand on your heart and sincerely tell me that you do not have *any* of those beliefs?

No, really. Stop and think about that, because if we do not get past this first challenge, then the rest of the book will merely be a nice story. And you'll finish it saying, "*Yeah, that was interesting; I can see how it worked for him. But it's different for me; I don't have the time to do any of that stuff. Besides, I'm not really sure how to make that work in my business life, and really,*

*it's not what I want out of life, anyway. At least, I don't think so. Actually, I'm not entirely sure."*

These were the beliefs that I clung to for almost a decade—and they nearly bankrupted me. However, this was just the jolt I needed to get real, become honest, expose my real self, and take a long, hard look at my life and my actions, and prepare myself to learn.

As a young businessperson, I would run all over the world gathering information, attending conferences, and being what I thought was a human business sponge. In reality, I was talking the talk but not walking the walk. I was too afraid to implement change for fear of getting it wrong. I thought I was smart, but I was simply egotistical and arrogant. I thought I was going places, but I was simply running around in circles. I thought I was innovative, but I was just repackaging the same crappy concepts in different wrapping paper. And most of all, I thought I was a great business leader, but I was simply *threatening* everyone to follow me.

It was all wrong. And I didn't even know it.

I was making a buck, driving fast cars, living in a nice house, drinking good wine with friends—doing all the fun things that came with developing a successful private enterprise. And the reality of life was simply irrelevant to me. I was erratic, unfocused, and pretty much unaware of anything or anyone around me. I, too, was one of those small businesspeople looking for the magic bullet, searching externally for something to make success easy for me. Something “out there” of course, because surely the problem with my businesses could not be *me!*

Then came a moment of truth that forced me to get back to reality.

It was the 1990s, and I'd been in business for almost 10 years—not just one business, but a number of unrelated companies. Over the course of the previous decade, I had owned a property development business, a recording studio, an advertising and marketing business, and even a pizza shop.

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Yup, a bunch of eclectic business adventures for sure. In fact, I often look back and say to myself, “Why the hell did you get into that?” The answer was that many of my professional decisions were driven by ego. I’d become involved with these businesses by convincing myself that I knew what I was doing, when all I was doing was allowing my ego to run my life and my companies. I was too afraid to ask for help and too busy telling everybody else how clever I was, for fear of bruising that ego.

I can recall a day that I was spending at home in my lounge room. We’d just bought a pizza shop and I had a bunch of mates over to celebrate. One of them remarked, “How cool is this? You get free pizza.” At that moment, the reality of my business decision hit me. I looked down at the boxes of pizza strewn across the table and responded, “Free!!!! These suckers cost me \$10,000 a piece!” All of a sudden, my business investment seemed ridiculous.

The simple truth was that I had a handful of businesses all running simultaneously at that time, some of them in different parts of the country, all of them doing okay and making a bit of money, but none of them doing great. In short, we lucked out on many of the decisions I was making and had stumbled to a level of moderate success. There was no ability involved, just sheer arrogance.

And then came my first moment of truth.

Almost as if interest rates went through the roof overnight, the Asian economy went through the floor. That had a severely detrimental impact on the Australian economy, and a domino effect that led to a number of our clients going out the back door.

I remember it clear as day. I was on a flight home from Tokyo, returning from yet another conference where I sat happily in the audience taking notes for days on end and gathering information and inspiration from the sensational lineup of speakers. As was normal on the journey home, my fear-based beliefs started to kick in as I went back over my notes. My self-talk was already throwing ideas out the plane window.

*“Yeah, I don’t have time to use that in my business. Nah, it’s different for us; that won’t work. Hmm . . . not sure what he meant by that, but it doesn’t matter; probably won’t suit us, anyway. I know what I’m doing. Yeah, I don’t know why we would do that; it’s not really part of our plan. I don’t think so, anyway. Maybe . . . not sure.”*

But something snapped in me as the plane started its descent into Sydney airport. I somehow knew that this time my return home was going to be . . . well, different. I truly felt this time that I was going to make a change in my life. I just didn’t know why or how. Maybe it was the profoundness of the information I had gleaned during my trip; or maybe it was just that I was *ready* for change.

As I walked up the aerobridge, I had a strange feeling. I was both excited about being home and keen to get back to work to report on some of the great things I had learned. At the same time, I was somewhat terrified that the implementation of those changes was going to be monumental!

I turned my cell phone on as I got off the plane and for the first time in four days, it kicked into the network (the Japanese cell phone network is not compatible with those of many other countries). The first call came through in the early morning chill; it was the office calling to inform me that three of our clients had announced over the weekend that they were filing for bankruptcy. My mental calculator went into overdrive and told me that little bit of news had put us in a cash hole of about \$375,000.

I went out through customs at the international terminal and I got another call from one of my bankers that started out something like this: “G’day Troy. Listen, we heard about some of your clients over the weekend, and we’re just giving you a call to inform you that there will be a registered letter issued to you today. We’re calling up your overdraft.” I protested that we were not out of terms, which was only met with, “Yeah, well, this is a precautionary move on our part, given that we know what is happening in your business at the moment with some of

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your clients. Since we know it will take you some time to work it out, we're just protecting our interests." Gotta love those banks; they know just how and where to put the boot when you're down. (And they wonder why nobody likes them!)

I was a bit wounded by this stage but still felt like I had a few more rounds left in me before I was going to accept a technical knockout. But shortly thereafter, I was dealt another blow from my other bank. "Yeah, G'day Troy. We're just giving you a courtesy call to let you know that you'll get some official advice in the mail in relation to your overdraft." Same story here; they wanted their money, too.

Capping this off was a call from the tax office advising me that I was about to receive a tax bill I could not jump over with a payment deadline that I could not meet.

I was taking a total and absolute belting on all fronts. And the worst part was that it was still too early in the day for a drink!

On first estimate, I figured that this was going to leave us about \$500,000 in the hole by the time the tsunami had subsided; the final number climbed closer to the \$1 million mark. In short, we were up the creek, and not only did we not have a paddle, we had no map and a hole in the boat to boot.

I was shattered. I had pulled many rabbits out of hats over the previous years to get us out of a poor cash position. However, I had nowhere to run this time. I don't care how solid your business is; you take that much money out of the cash flow and it ain't pretty.

I started to do some soul searching. How did I get myself into this; and how was I going to get myself *out* of this? And whose fault was it, anyway?

I got to the office and went straight to a staff meeting. I figured that the one thing I should not do was panic in front of the team. Instead, I just delivered the truth as best I could understand and describe it.

"Okay, so you've all seen the newspaper over the weekend, and you've all got a number of questions as to how we are going

to get ourselves out of this spot. We've got some challenges ahead of us in the next few months, and what I want to do immediately is just make a commitment to change—one thing at a time, one day at a time—to get us back on track. And it starts *now*. Every morning we're going to have a quick staff meeting during which I am going to ask each of you three questions:

- "1. How did you do yesterday?"
- "2. What are you focused on today?"
- "3. How are you going to do it better tomorrow?"

"Starting today, I am focused on how we are going to protect our future. Starting tomorrow, I am going to work on being a better communicator. I am going to tell you everything that is going on in the business so you have the confidence that we'll be able to make it through this spot.

"I am going to call a meeting with each of our creditors and ask them for their support. And I am going to call a meeting with our top clients and ask that they help out, too. We've been good to them for a decade; it's time to cash in the chips. Finally, I am going to ask them to start paying for our services in advance."

The staff looked and listened, and over the course of an hour, they began to see my commitment to change.

It was one of the toughest meetings I think I have ever had, mainly because I was standing in front of my team and completely exposing myself as their leader. I was standing in my naked truth. This was the real position of the business and my honest assessment of what we needed to do to get out of the spot we were in. No sugar coating, no ego, no smoke and mirrors.

However, that was just the start of the pain. It was going to get much worse.

Early the following Saturday morning, I stood at my dining room table staring down at the pile of bills, cash flow projections, debtor and creditor printouts, and asset and

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liability assessments. I began to feel the enormity of the challenge ahead of us.

That morning, I called in my advisory board for an emergency meeting. We elected to engage an administrator to help us get back on our feet and—hopefully—avoid going broke. But it wasn't going to be easy. Weeks turned into months, months into years, and every day it seemed harder and harder to get out of bed. It was as if we were working so hard and so quickly to repair the damage, and yet everything seemed to be moving so slowly. I felt like Steve Austin in one of those running scenes from the *Six Million Dollar Man*. I knew I could go fast, but it just didn't look that way to others.

My marriage took a hammering. I was working back-to-back 16-hour days in an out-of-shape, overweight body. Each day morphed into the next, and I seemed to only get a break from the beating when I crawled home and inhaled as many beers as I could before passing out for a few hours—only to get up and do it all over again.

I was in a very bad place.

But, pain and heartache aside, one of the greatest things I learned through this period was that if I was to get back on track,

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I had to once again face the truth and address the one common denominator between success and failure in any of my businesses or my life. It was me!

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Some 10 years earlier on the beach I had learned my first lesson, the lesson of learning. Well, it seemed it was time for me to remind myself how to start really learning again.

It was time for me to start looking *internally* instead of externally for the solution to my problems.

And it occurred to me that learning how to learn is not something you do once. It is something you need to continually

remind yourself to do, or you will inevitably return to poor belief systems. It is a continual journey, and not just one that's focused on business; it requires that we go back to a sense of self and a place of truth and reality. This was a perspective I had lost over the previous 10 years, so I needed to relearn some of the things I had forgotten. And not just about business, but things about *me*. I needed to peel back some of the layers of unreality that had yet again become part of my being and learn to be comfortable in my skin once more.

I realized how simple it was for a career-centric mind to become trapped in the wrong beliefs, even when we know, on some level, that they're wrong. I began to see how easy it is for businesspeople to get so caught up in the professional tornado that they also lose a sense of being and forget what they are really trying to achieve among the noise.

So, before we get into the questions you really want answered, let me share my first lesson: the lesson of learning.

Now, I want you to work with me here for a moment. I need you to clear your mind totally to be able to effectively receive the information on the following pages. I need you to go back to basics, set aside some of those fear-based beliefs, and get true to you.

Let's make a start.

You'll notice throughout this book that I will give you little exercises to do, things to try, or notions to ponder at a later date—thought-starters, if you will. They are designed to help you form snapshots of what you look like now and what you *could* look like in the future if you put your mind to it. But before we get into conquering your fear-based beliefs and preparing you for change in business, I want you to do the following for me.

Grab a pad, a journal, or use the workbook note pages in the back of this book—anything you can use to keep notes on the things you may learn. This is a place for you to reflect when you've finished each chapter and gathered the information. This is *important*. If you don't record the information, the

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messages I am about to deliver to you in my stories will get jumbled and will be open to all sorts of strange interpretation. And then they'll inevitably get caught up in your old, fear-based beliefs, and the unreality of your life will kick back in and stop you from learning.

Let me offer you a scenario of your business and life right here, right now.

You have about a million business decisions to make right now. Your head is muddled with stuff. You wake up most days tired from the day before and the lack of sleep you've had overnight from thinking about what you need to deal with today. I call it "the rattles"—the 3 A.M. toss and turn as you try and piece one business day together with the next and the decisions you have to make in an effort to find some flow. You feel like you are pushing square pegs in round holes and it's just, well, *hard*. I know how this feels. I lived it for almost two decades.

Remember how fun it was when you started out in business? You had a blank slate, no preconceived ideas on how everything should work; you just made it up as you went along and seized opportunities as they were presented to you. And each morning you jumped out of bed to get into the day, and you loved it!

So what changed?

*You did.*

Business didn't all of a sudden get tougher somehow; you just started to put more boundaries on it. Customers did not all abruptly become hard work; you just lost interest in working with them. Your staff did not suddenly become incompetent oxygen thieves with the IQ of a small, stuffed parrot; you just stopped leading and training them, and you lost interest in their lives. And though the economy *did* change, it didn't happen overnight; you were just not on top of the numbers as tightly as you should have been in the good times to prepare for the inevitable economic cycle and the bad times that come with that.

Economic change is indeed an interesting phenomenon. As soon as we experience a bump in the road, it rapidly turns into a minor road hazard, then into a pothole, then a major roadblock. And then everybody stands around looking at it, wondering who should fix it, while trying to figure out who *else* they can hand the shovel to. It's a bit like the council, really.

The fact is that every economic correction simply signals the end of the cycle. Think about it; the banks irresponsibly lent money to a lot of people who quite possibly were not able to pay it back. These people took that money irresponsibly, knowing, at least in part, that they were going to struggle to pay it back should something shift in the market. Businesses oversold to those people and took some of that newfound, negligently attained wealth so that they, too, could cash in on the gravy train. They then immediately went out and spent that money recklessly, while ignoring the likelihood that there would no doubt be another shift in the market sometime; after all, this has historically been the case. And the government sat around and watched this happen—for years! And their excuse for their inaction was to take the accolades that they were, in fact, “growing the economy as part of the economic development strategy”... yeah right! Just a bunch of political, economic handbags on both sides of the fence.

And then, seemingly out of the blue—as if by total accident—the bubble burst, and everyone stood around asking, “Wow, how did *that* happen?” Well guess what? It happens every 7 to 10 years; it has been happening since the Great Depression, and it will happen again sometime in the future. Boom, boom, boom, bust, recovery. It's a cycle!

So who is responsible for all that? *We all are!*

It took me three major economic shifts to figure that out. The first one I experienced as a businessperson was during the 1980s, and it cost me \$250,000. The second took place in the 1990s, and cost me closer to \$1 million. My third experience came in the early 2000s with the tech wreck or dot-com bust. By this time, however, I had become a little smarter, and bought

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into technology *after* the bubble burst in 2001. Then, coming into 2007, my colleagues and I began to see the signs once again, so we contained debt and battened down the hatches as best we could in preparation for the inevitable crash. And *still* I found myself not as ready as I wanted to be. I can look back now and see strategies that would have better prepared us for the end of the cycle; these are all things we can do next time to ensure that we are more resilient.

So, what am I trying to say with all of this? It's a tough thing to look at that mirror, however, at the end of the day, *you* are the common denominator between success and failure in business and in life. It's all about you!

Unless you get yourself on track, there is no way in the world that you can get your business on track. So let's start there. Let's get you back to your truth and rebuild the new you in preparation to learn, *before* we look to rebuild your business.

I didn't write this book as a way to sympathize with you or admit that it really *is* too hard. I am not here to say, "There, there, I understand; it will all be alright. Just attract better things into your life, and everything will fall into place." This is not about us all having a group pity party and a good whine about how the banks/government/business leaders/economists/ (insert anything you like here) got it wrong. This *is* about saying, "Screw them; I need to take responsibility, get real, and fix this myself." This is about getting off your backside to make that change, to tackle the really hard things in your life head-on and drag yourself out of Groundhog Day and into a new way of life that maybe—just maybe—might not be so hard!

After all, hard is just a perception.

You see, as humans, we forget "easy," and in fact, we *create* hard. The world in which we live constantly sends us messages about things to learn, do, be, and aspire to. Yet the most "real" most of us ever were was during our early years on this planet, when we had little exposure to the world. Back then, we were free from the corruption of perception and were truly living in reality.

And that's where I want to get you back to—your reality and your truth. Because only then can you face the real issues in your life and truly make it easier than it is right now.

Okay, now that you know you are going to have to face some tough issues in your life, here's the second bit of unpleasant news. In the search for easy, I know you'll be looking for simple answers, quick fixes, and overnight solutions. You're probably thinking, "Just tell me what to do and I'll be on my way to ease, happiness, and contentment." Well, I'm not here to give you that gem, either. I'm just here to offer you some of the life and business lessons that I, and others, have learned so that you might find easy yourself.

The journey is long, but if we are to truly plan a stronger future for ourselves, then we need to be clear that every action we take *today* will have a reaction on the future of our business and our lives *tomorrow*.

Let's start by clearing your head and taking responsibility for learning.

### Taking Responsibility to Learn

*Three things you need to do now to Future-Proof Your Business and prepare yourself to truly learn*

#### Action One

Put your hand on your heart—right here and now—and ask yourself: "Am I really in my truth? Do I genuinely believe that I am making my decisions based on truth, not fear? Am I caught in any of the four killer belief systems that will stop me from absorbing information and, in turn, ultimately cause me to get in my own way on my path to success?"

(continued)

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*(Continued)*

Ask yourself this question *every single day*. Make it a habit. Don't take the easy, fear-induced road when faced with a tough decision; take the one that leads to truth and reality. When gathering information for your business, make sure you are not succumbing to any of the four killer fear-based beliefs before you discard it.

### Action Two

Know the *real* position of your business, not the safe position you have sold to yourself. Write that down, stare at it, absorb it, own it, take responsibility, and deal with it. Don't cut corners on your reporting and accountability to yourself.

You can only really apply the things you learn in life if you are applying them to the honest position you're currently in. Lying to yourself will only come back and bite you five times harder somewhere down the track. However, building on a platform of reality will, in turn, offer you a *real* outcome.

### Action Three

Ask yourself every time you receive any piece of information, "Am I really, truly open to learning and absorbing things around me?" Are you ready to make a commitment to becoming more aware?

That's you being true, being real, and down to business. And that's your first step to becoming a success.