

Your Business Matters

November 2019

Facing the Facts

What Remote Meetings Don't Give You

At the time of writing, I just got back from a client's franchisee meeting in Austin, Texas. As happy as I am to be sleeping in my own bed again, I can't deny it was a great trip. In fact, the experience reaffirmed two core beliefs of mine: There's nothing like great barbecue, and teleconferencing will never carry the same weight as face-to-face interaction.

Now, I know this sounds like I'm about to launch into a manifesto against modern technology, bemoaning the loss of some mythical era when a handshake "meant something," but that's not where I'm going with this. I appreciate smartphones and cloud computing as much as any other modern business owner. To tell you the truth, 9 times out of 10, I'd rather hop onto a conference call than into a Boeing 737. The fact that I still came away feeling it only could have been done in person speaks to the event's success.

This isn't me tooting my own horn, either. Our firm simply played an advisory role in the proceedings. Our client made this franchisee meeting a tour de force. As a company, they go the extra mile to be inclusive — ensuring everyone's voice is heard.

Now, this strategy isn't guaranteed to work on its own. Inclusivity can quickly swing into overindulgence if you aren't careful — it takes a



practiced hand to keep the meeting's business moving forward. The CEO, who was leading the meeting, has this skill, and every attendee knew they and their opinions were heard without the conversation devolving into an endless debate and half-measures. I, for one, was impressed. Even the decision to hold this meeting in person had been calculated to keep the event running smoothly.

When you hold a meeting over the phone, even when video conferencing, you miss a very important ingredient for reaching consensus: the opportunity for relationship building. This event in Austin was more than a few hours spent in a conference room; there was a cocktail party, a group lunch at Cooper's Barbecue, and, of course, a group dinner at Iron Cactus. A phone call doesn't give you the kind of bonding you get from chowing down on beef ribs and coleslaw together.

Face-to-face events like this allow all parties involved the chance to get to know each other outside the context of business proceedings. I can't overstate how powerful this can be; socializing with others is one of the best ways to build mutual trust. That way, when it comes time to head back to the boardroom, relationships aren't purely defined by adversarial interests. You've fostered the goodwill necessary for authentic, productive discussions and negotiations.

Obviously, I had time to reflect on our success during my (long) flight home. At the time, I just had a general impression that the meeting went well. But looking back, I realize this couldn't have been replicated over the phone. So, next time you have an important meeting, I suggest thinking about doing it in person, preferably somewhere with great barbecue.

Cheers,

-Ed Alexander

BUSINESS LESSONS FROM A RADICAL INDUSTRIALIST



How to Get Rich Without Hurting the Planet

As awareness about the global impact of climate change rises, consumers have started to vote with their dollars for companies that offer greener, more sustainable products and practices. Slowly, that groundswell has caused businesses to shift their priorities and take steps to track and reduce their environmental impact. But long before the green movement began in earnest, there was Ray Anderson — one man who decided to flip the script.

In 1994, Anderson was 60 years old, the CEO of the modular carpet company Interface, Inc., and no more environmentally aware than his contemporaries. But when his customers started asking about the environmental impact of his carpets, he dropped into the rabbit hole of environmental research and emerged a changed man. He had a new goal for his \$1 billion company: It would take nothing from the earth that the planet couldn't replace.

In 2009, Interface created and sold over 83 million square yards of carpet without negatively impacting the planet or losing revenue. Anderson chronicles his journey from point A to point B in his book, "Business Lessons from a Radical Industrialist."

According to Inc. magazine, Anderson, who passed away in 2011, was considered "the greenest CEO in America." His company mastered sustainable innovation, and its patents, products, and processes are revealed in his book, which is as much a guide for entrepreneurs of the future as it is for those of the present.

One reader on Amazon reviewed the book as "Inspiring," writing, "If only the world had more Ray Andersons. The fact that he turned a company reliant on the use of petrochemicals for the production of its core product into [a company] with sustainability as its core ideology and was able to improve his profits is outstanding. Any and every company can learn something from this book."

If you're trying to lessen your business's impact on the planet and tap into a market of environmentally conscious consumers, "Business Lessons from a Radical Industrialist" is the place to start.

BREAK AWAY FROM BLAND



How to Write Content That Pops

When it comes to winning over customers with content marketing, many entrepreneurs seem to think, "If we publish, they will come." That would certainly explain the flood of bland, cookie-cutter blog posts pumped out across social media every day. To win over readers and make the most of your marketing dollars, your content needs to have a personality — a voice. Of course, personalizing content comes with a few pitfalls every marketer needs to know.

Don't Write How You Speak

Read a few sentences from your favorite book or newspaper. Do you think the author speaks exactly like that in real life? Probably not. Speech and writing are two different mediums with different stylistic needs, and trying to translate one to the other can prove disastrous. For example, many content writers include verbal cues like dramatic pauses ... by including useless ellipses. In a conversation, strategic pauses may impress, but on the page, they pull readers out of the article.

Contractions Aren't Your Enemy

On the other end of the spectrum, some people write like robots. They avoid contractions like "don't," "can't," and "aren't," resulting in stilted, plodding sentences that inflate word counts and alienate readers. Obviously, formal publications like research papers and legal briefs still maintain this archaic ban on mashing words together, but when it comes to marketing content, rules are flexible. Do not fear using these tools. You cannot go wrong with adding a splash of informality to your writing. Your readers are not going to mind. (Are you still with me?)

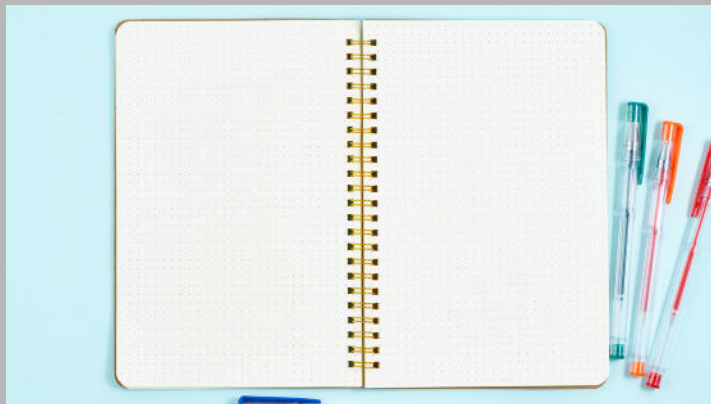
Show, Don't Tell

This is a big one. So many businesses publish copy with big statements like "We love our customers!" or "Our passion is helping you!" These blanket sentiments come across as shallow. So, rather than *tell* customers you care about their needs, write content that *shows* them you understand their needs and want to help address them. We care deeply about your marketing campaigns and want to help them succeed!

When you're an entrepreneur or a business leader, your to-do list can feel more like a novel than a manageable list. But what if you could order your thoughts, track your accomplishments, and maintain organization all on your own terms? It may sound too good to be true, but bullet journaling does just that.

What Is It?

Despite what the name may suggest, bullet journaling has little to do with writing out your feelings — unless you want to do that! Instead, it's a log of all your to-do lists, reminders, and tracking systems in one convenient place. The goal is to complete tasks and update your journal each day. You can even download a companion app to digitally stay on top of your tracking.



The beauty of bullet journaling is customization. If you're a visual person, create drawings or tape down pictures to represent your tasks. If you prefer precise outlines, use ruled pages to order each goal and its subtasks. A bullet journal can include every aspect of your business down to the smallest logistical details, or it can break down a single, complicated aspect, such as vendor tracking, into one journal. The look and function of your bullet journal is completely up to you and your process.

How Do I Do It?

Despite the versatility, every bullet journal shares a couple key components. First, you need a legend or key to identify what symbols mean throughout your journal. For example, a square next to a task may indicate it is a high priority, or a star may mean a task has been completed. Any group of symbols will work, but consistency keeps you organized.

Second, you need a calendar in your bullet journal. That way, you can organize your goals by year, month, week, or day and keep track of smaller goals along the way. Throughout your journal, create separate sections for as many breakdowns as you want, but the key is to keep it all connected.

No longer do you need to carry around a to-do list, a planner, and a calendar. Turn to bullet journaling to revolutionize the way you organize. For more tips, inspiration, and information on how bullet journaling can help you and your business, visit BulletJournal.com.

HAVE A *Laugh*

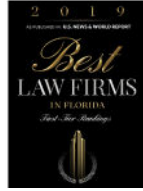


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Execute Strategy and Kill Stagnancy *3 Tips for Every Business Leader*

**"To me, ideas are worth nothing unless executed ...
Execution is worth millions."**

-Steve Jobs

Anyone can take this advice to heart, whether you're a stay-at-home parent or the CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Ideas are easy, but no one becomes successful because they had a great idea. Success comes from putting that idea into action. Being able to execute a plan is a skill every business leader needs. Here are three steps to help you improve your execution.

1. Ditch Perfection

Have you ever watched a behind-the-scenes featurette of your favorite movie? Some of the most successful films were all but unrecognizable in their early phases. In fact, a lot of early concepts are terrible. Look up the original designs for Woody in "Toy Story" to see for yourself. Fortunately, rather than wait for the perfect script, creators executed their visions and make changes as needed.

Putting off action in favor of creating the perfect plan or strategy leads to stagnant business. Successful people know that plans take many shapes before they reach their final form. Don't jump into something without a clear plan, but don't be afraid to define your strategy as you go. There's a reason audiences won't be flocking to theaters to watch the latest galactic adventures of Luke *Starkiller* this December.

2. Be Methodical

While you shouldn't wait for the perfect plan, you shouldn't be flying in blind, either. You can be too energetic about execution. Make sure everyone involved in a plan knows their responsibilities.

Confusion will torpedo any strategy faster than you can say, "Who was in charge of this?" The Harvard Business Review states, "Having the discipline to organize people, assemble resources, and then generate a plan that others can commit to will collectively improve execution."

3. Evaluate, Evaluate, Evaluate

We're not saying you should micromanage your team, but you do need to be checking in on a regular basis to evaluate progress on your plan. Schedule monthly or quarterly meetings to go over the strategy. This is where you look for any changes that need to be made and refine the strategy.

A smart strategy feels reassuring, but learning to execute a plan is the only way to make progress. The best business plan in the world is worthless if you never follow through.

