

*Why is it that successful people seem to have a lot of good luck?
Successful people make their own luck by putting themselves
in so many good situations good luck seems to follow them.
Ergo: the harder you work, the luckier you are.*

*~~~~~
The easiest way to kill success is to accept failure.
~ Donald McHenry ~*

Introduction

CLUELESS IS A DANGEROUS PLACE TO BE.

In business, being clueless maims profitability, dismembers relationships, and kills time. When you open a business, assume a new job, or are promoted to a new position within your company, you want to succeed. You want to knock the socks off your employees, co-workers, and/or boss. Admitting ignorance (i.e., being clueless) simply doesn't portray the picture of the savvy, thriving professional you have in your mind.

Because I want you to feel safe, know you're among friends, and understand upfront that *we were all clueless at one point in time*, I'll share a couple of my "clueless" stories.

I once bought a car based on my certainty that a big commission check would arrive in the mail no later than the first of the following month. You just winced, right? Good. That means you're not as clueless as I was. I had to borrow \$500 from my father to make it through until the commission check actually arrived. I remember the exact date: April 12, 1984. I remember the humiliation of having to ask for that loan, too.

Here's another memorable date: October 12, 1985. It commemorates my first visit to an accountant's office. Problem is, it took place ten months *after* I opened my first business.

Clueless again.

The two previous scenarios were not life-threatening. They didn't bring about financial ruin or provoke the interest of the IRS. They did make me realize, however, that if I continued making uninformed, risky decisions, disaster would soon become a close friend.

Here's a newsflash, folks: everyone is ignorant. In the primary sense of the word, *ignorant* doesn't mean stupid; it means *lacking knowledge or comprehension*. It's impossible to know and comprehend everything. Even those of us who consider ourselves experts don't know it all—and never will.

Here's another newsflash: no one is born knowing much of anything. Business people, like athletes and artists, aren't born—they're developed.

Have you ever known an infant to spring from the womb and toss a layup? (Assuming a basketball were handy, that is.)

Have you ever known a toddler to grab his paint box and say to his mother, "I think I'll mix blue and yellow to create the precise shade of green I'm looking for?"

I didn't think so.

Yes, some individuals are born with innate talents and skills. Bill Gates, Michael Jordan, and Monet aren't ordinary individuals. If Bill's mama had stuck a paintbrush in his two year-old hand with instructions to daub a pond and a few lilies on a canvas, it's unlikely his masterpiece would've rivaled one of Monet's.

Research, practice, and hanging out with their peers had a lot to do with the phenomenal success of these three gentlemen. Which is a perfect segue into talking about *you*. What are *your* innate talents and skills? In what areas do *you* have a wealth of knowledge and comprehension? In what areas are you *ignorant*?

Few people ask themselves these questions. Mysteries abound in this world, whether they're contained between the covers of a mystery novel or bubbling beneath the pretense of camaraderie at the office. Asking and answering questions (e.g., solving mysteries) are essential components of any business person's success.

For purposes of this book, I refer not only to those individuals who actually own businesses, but also to individuals who own every aspect of their lives.

- People who are *invested* in their lives.
- People who consider themselves responsible for their actions, their failures to act, and the relationships in which they participate.
- People who work in careers instead of jobs and whose levels of passion and commitment have nothing to do with the parties issuing their paychecks and everything to do with their values systems.

In short, people like you—who want to do more and be more. People who want to learn and understand; people who want to see the clues along the way.

In nearly thirty-six years of working in the business world, I've learned that a person's job title and annual salary have nothing to do with his or her level of professionalism. I know a woman who sells Mary Kay products part-time; she behaves with more business skills and acumen than many people I've dealt with, including an insurance agency manager, a bank vice-president, and the owner of a graphic design company.

If your preconception of a successful business person is one who wears a designer suit, carries a leather briefcase, drives a German sports car, and earns a six-figure income, you may want to put your preconception aside for the next two-hundred pages or so.

The label inside a designer suit is not proof of its wearer's success. It simply affirms the person once had enough money to purchase it. The label has nothing to do with his or her attitude, level of knowledge, talents, skills, and values. Keep in mind that money can be acquired in a multitude of ways.

Earning it is only one of those ways. Sure, you can earn money because you have a good attitude, you're smart, and you work hard. You can also earn it by being an embezzler or a hit man.

Another thing you need to know before you delve deeper into *Taking the Mystery out of Business* is my take on the word *success*. Although Webster cites "achieving a desirable outcome" as the tangible, black and white definition of *success*, each of us possesses unique desires and goals which, in turn, generate personal, private concepts of success. My personal version of *success in business* involves several requirements. My business pursuits MUST...

1. Generate enough money to support the lifestyle I've chosen,
2. Make me happy and satisfied with the work I do, and
3. Make a difference to my clients and the other business people with whom I interact.

What's the point of working at a job or in a career if you don't like what you're doing or the people with whom you spend the majority of your day?

Now, your definition may be different—and that's fine. If we all agreed, we'd have nothing to talk about. Seriously, I shared my definition so you know where I'm coming from; my job is taking the mystery *out* of business, not injecting mystery into it.

One final note: we all have strengths and weaknesses. Some of us are good at math while others are mathematically challenged. Some of us are verbal, while others have the communication skills of a doorknob. The key to being successful in business is knowing what

your strengths and weaknesses are, and then moving forward based on that knowledge. If you don't know what your strengths are, how can you capitalize on them? If you don't know what your weaknesses are, how can you work around them or improve them?

If you don't understand a subject, it isn't necessarily because you have a weakness or an incapacity. Maybe the details of the subject were communicated to you in a fashion that simply didn't mesh with the way you receive information. Maybe you weren't in a receptive mood. If you do understand a subject, it isn't necessarily because you're brilliant (although, in most cases, that's probably true); maybe the person who explained it did so with an insight few others share.

Taking the Mystery out of Business is my personal perspective on the world of business. It's based on my chosen career path and passions, the people I've known, and the events I've experienced. I don't claim to know everything. However, I have learned some valuable lessons while working for other people, establishing four businesses, and actively working in those same businesses. My hope is that by sharing these lessons, I might encourage you to look at business from an angle you haven't considered before.

I also hope that during the course of living your professional life you don't overlook your personal life. After all, the reason most of us work is to provide food, shelter, and luxuries for ourselves and our loved ones. We care about ourselves and our families. We want to be happy, and we want to make our loved ones happy. If we didn't, we'd sit on the sofa in our parents' house, watching TV with a can of soda in one hand and bag of chips in the other.

As responsible adults, we don't sponge off others—we are providers. We are breadwinners. We are hunters who head out into the wilderness, slay dragons, and bring home the dragon meat—while our families go about their lives, safe and protected. If we neglect our

families and ourselves, if we don't spend enough time enjoying the fruit of our labors and *sharing* with our loved ones, work doesn't become a means to an end—it becomes an end unto itself.

Yes, work is hard—that's why it's called work instead of play. But if we seek help and assistance when we need it, it's no harder than it needs to be. It becomes a challenge we can overcome instead of a brick wall against which we continuously bash our heads.

My goal is to take the subject of business and break it down into chapters and scenes, to help you recognize the clues and identify the villains so you can carry on with the story of your life without falling victim to the killer aspects of the business world. Once you've peeled back the complex layers of business to expose its basic components, you'll be able to plot out your course and achieve your goals while avoiding mayhem and having to commit murder. (Or worse, professional suicide.)

Linda Faulkner, July 2010

The mysteries and Challenges of business:

A Perspective from Today's Business Person

IN COMPLETING THE RESEARCH FOR THIS BOOK, I interviewed a number of people to learn their views on the challenges they face in business. The people I interviewed cover a broad spectrum of professionals: business owner, employee, sales person, financial advisor, registered nurse, magazine publisher, photographer, attorney, author, IT specialist, recruiter, retiree, and banker. They also represent a variety of age groups and geographic locations.

The following topics represent some of the mysteries with which today's business people are faced.

- **How to conduct proactive endeavors rather than reactive responses.** Instead of utilizing technology that can prevent calamity, business people often wait until calamity strikes and then expect technology to repair the damage. How can business people prevent calamity?
- **How to achieve a feeling of personal satisfaction and reward.** Working for someone else creates a level of frustration when an individual gives 110 percent but isn't recognized for that contribution. How can business people receive appropriate personal satisfaction and professional
- reward without having to establish their own businesses?

- **How to deal with government control.** City, county, state, and federal regulations often impact the establishment of new businesses with requirements for licensing, permits, taxation, signage, zoning, etc. How can business people start businesses without losing time and money trying to
 - meet these requirements and how can they figure out how to comply?
- **How to monitor cause and effect.** It's frustrating for a person in a new career or business industry to determine which actions generate what results and how actions and outcomes relate to each other. How can business people monitor cause and effect so they know which activities are productive and which are not?
- **How to control your own future.** The employer always calls the shots. How can business people become self-employed or start their own businesses and figure out how to control outcomes—and their futures?
- **How to manage time effectively.** No matter what kind of job or career a person has, his or her performance always relies upon other people: employee turnover, the economy, coworkers, and management. How can business people manage their time effectively when other people mess
 - with their days?
- **How to ask for help.** Each day is a puzzle to be pieced together. Some days the pieces don't always fit. If business people don't ask for help, they'll never solve the puzzle.
 - How do business people know who to ask for help?
- **How to advertise.** Every business needs to advertise. How do business people figure out what works for them—and why it works?

- **How to maintain integrity.** The reality of today's business market affects everyone. How can a business person avoid making the mistake of not facing that reality? How can a business person deal with the reality of today's business market while being honest with employees?
- **How to express appreciation.** With so many customer needs and demands, competition is fierce. How can a business person show customers they're truly appreciated?

Mental Attitude

ATTITUDE IS THE SINGLE most important element of success.

No other component of achieving a desirable outcome bears more weight than actually believing you'll acquire what you seek.

Attitude is a choice. It's not something we're born with—like arms and legs. Yes, we each have a certain intrinsic capacity with respect to intelligence and disposition. Our perspectives and preferences, however, dictate more about our attitudes than anything else does.



I began writing in elementary school. Although I spent stints wanting to be a doctor, rock star, and teacher, I always wanted to be a writer—a published writer. So, I wrote. And submitted my work for publication. And got rejected. Ad nauseum.

After witnessing the cycle, my first husband informed me I was nuts. He viewed my writing/submission/rejection pattern as an exercise in futility and refused to support my *fantasy*.

He didn't agree with Thomas Edison, who said, "I have not failed. I've just found 10,000 ways that won't work." I, however, knew exactly how old Tom felt. I figured if 10,000 was the magic number I had to reach, every rejection I received brought me that much closer to my goal.

I completed my first mystery novel in 1988 and submitted it to several publishers without achieving the desired outcome. Between then and 2002, when I first became published, I wrote just about anything I could think of: short stories, mystery novels, romance novels, insurance texts, magazine articles, personnel handbooks, advertising copy, etc.

One of my businesses is an education service; it offers career development workshops and insurance continuing education seminars and courses. I wrote the entire curriculum and teach the seminars. All that insurance writing served to fuel my motivation to write and publish a
mystery novel.

Voila! In 2009, my first mystery novel was published. An overnight ... er, 21-year success story. Since then, I've had many things published in a variety of genres and formats. I became a teacher too—I present approximately 75 workshops and seminars each year. Not the same kind of teacher I envisioned in high school, but a teacher nonetheless.



I hope you make a conscious correlation between my story and yours. Writing is my passion. So I write. Anything: insurance, business, fiction, nonfiction. In fact, I'm so passionate about writing I incorporated it into my business life.

What's your passion? Gardening? Golf? The stock market? Basketball? When did it become your passion—and why? Whatever it is, are you doing it now? If not, when did you stop? More importantly, *why did you stop?*

That, folks, is the real mystery.

If you surrender or quit, you'll never achieve your personalized version of success. Why, then, do so many people give up their dreams? Is it because the journey to achieving the desired outcome is strewn with obstacles? Is it because we lack confidence? Is it because we believe people when they tell us our dreams are unrealistic?

Here's a clue: if you keep hitting brick walls as you mosey down the path to your goal—no matter what it is—don't assume the path just ended. Walk around the brick walls. Dig beneath

them. Find a ladder, lean it against the darned walls, and climb over them. If none of that works, hijack a stork and fly right over the top. I promise, the path continues on the other side.

How do I know? Because if it isn't mapped out for you, you have the *choice* to pave the way yourself.

Mental attitude is about choice; it's *choosing* to expect the best possible outcome. If that outcome isn't achieved, it's *choosing* to believe it will eventually be realized because *you will do* whatever needs to be done to accomplish that goal.

Optimists, like basketball superstars, are not born. People choose to be positive, expect favorable outcomes, and achieve success. This chapter will discuss several important aspects of positive mental attitude: confidence, the concept of failure, teamwork, and the most harmful quality in the world—negativity.