

POWER UP YOUR TRADIE BUSINESS

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

"Often we find that our customers have had a great apprenticeship on the tools but haven't had a lot of training on how to run a business. Matthew has provided training and guidance to 1,000's of Reece's customers. This training has proven to be extremely valuable and has helped these customers achieve their goals, whether that is increasing profitability, growing their business or spending more time with the family."

Adam Watson

Reece – Plumbing Marketing Leader

MATTHEW JONES

POWER

**UP YOUR TRADIE
BUSINESS**

A BLUEPRINT FOR SUCCESS

MATTHEW JONES



For Mum and Dad, who have never
judged and always encouraged –
for which I will be forever grateful.

For my wife, Nicole, thank you for always
supporting and believing in me.

And for my sons, Ethan and Bryn,
who provide inspiration every day.

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Introduction

ENSLAVED TO THE JOB

I looked at myself in the mirror with tears welling in my eyes. I felt like a failure, overwhelmed and angry. I had no money in the bank, bills were piled high and I had mouths to feed. On top of that, I had just received a letter from a liquidator stating that the debt collector I had engaged to recover \$30,000 owing from my builder client had gone into liquidation. You have got to be kidding me, right? The debt collection company has gone bankrupt? No! The debt collector had also taken me for the \$3000 I paid them to recover my \$30,000. So I was \$33,000 down. I was done.

This position of despair that I found myself in early 1997 was a culmination of all the choices I had made during the preceding seven years operating my plumbing business. My problem was not that the customer didn't pay or that the debt collector went broke. The problem was me. Looking into the mirror I could see history repeating again. Win some, lose some. Boom, bust. Money in the bank, no money in the bank. In control, out of control. Great clients, Mr. Creature clients (more on them later). I can do this, I can't do this. Who am I kidding?

It hit me at that moment I needed to make drastic changes fast. I couldn't keep running in survival mode year on year. The excitement of starting the business – with its promise of providing personal and financial freedom – was a distant memory. In its place was frustration and anger. I started the business because I wanted

to run my own show, to have control of my own destiny. However, right now I was out of control.

This brought a lot of questions to the surface. How did I get myself into a situation where I had created a job for myself that enslaved me? How come clients did not value the work we delivered? Why did clients keep coming back trying to drive down the price? Why did it seem the harder I worked, the less money I was making? Why was it that being great on the tools and delivering great work didn't automatically convert to money in the bank?

BETTER AT BUSINESS

At this point I realised being great on the tools was not enough – I had to be great at business. And to become great at business, I needed serious change. I had to put my hand up and admit I needed help – something that was not commonplace in the construction game at the time. What would my old South African boss who I started my plumbing apprenticeship with in the 1980s have thought if I showed any sign of weakness? Back then, it was work hard, and then work harder. It was get on the shovel and dig. It wasn't asking questions; it was just saying yes and getting on with it. It was being grateful for what you have, or getting kicked up the bum. No whinging, just do it.

Putting my hand up for help, even though I was at my lowest point, gave me a huge sense of relief, because I knew I could change my destiny. I could get control and make positive change. Rather than looking at my past as a series of failures, I changed my view to seeing it as the harsh learning experience I needed at that very moment in time. I knew this experience was going to make me a stronger person, and was an investment in the university of life.

I began feeling the same excitement that I experienced when I originally started my plumbing business, which had been extinguished a long time ago.

‘This is it,’ I told myself, and I made a promise to myself that never again would I be in this situation of helplessness. Never again would I rely on other people for my own success. Never again would I lack belief in myself. Never again would I surround myself with people who wanted to keep me down.

Now was the time to put my future plans into action. I began to feel sick as my head raced with all kinds of crazy ideas and self-doubts. I had to push them aside, however, and remind myself I was hungry to be great at business. I was hungry to learn what it takes to be great at business. I was hungry to provide a great lifestyle for my family.

Three months after receiving the letter notifying me the debt collector I had engaged was going into liquidation, I closed my plumbing business. I began applying for corporate jobs and tertiary study even though I couldn’t turn on a computer, and I didn’t even know what the internet was. This was scary, because change is scary. The last time I studied was when I completed my advanced plumbing at TAFE. At the time, I remember thinking, *You beauty! This is the last time I ever have to study.* Looking back now, I am thankful that I was very wrong.

LEARN EVERY DAY

After I closed my plumbing business, something happened that changed my life forever. I enrolled in a community college evening course to learn how to use a computer. The course ran for one night a week for 13 weeks. It was literally basic stuff like here is the power cord, plug it into the socket, turn on the computer, this is the keyboard. However, this was the best \$395 investment I had ever made. From that moment, as I started to learn about things that had previously scared me, I began to love learning. I began to understand that once you opened yourself up to the learning process, it

became easy and very enjoyable. I became hungry to learn, and I wanted more.

Over the next 10 years I immersed myself in learning as much as I could about business and personal success. I had the opportunity to be exposed to the boardrooms of several multinational organisations in general management roles, accountable for delivering \$100 million in revenue and inspiring teams of 200. At the same time, I challenged myself to complete my formal studies, earning a Bachelor of Business and Commence Degree from university, and an advanced business diploma. On a daily basis I also loved listening to or reading performance and success thought leaders such as Jim Rohn, Stephen Covey, Michael Gerber, Jack Welch, and Richard Branson. It totally opened my eyes. Awesome.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This book shares all my business experiences and learnings gained over some 25 years. Throughout my journey I discovered a 'Blueprint for Success' that I developed into a four-stage framework. Since 2007, the Blueprint for Success program has been delivered to successfully help over 5000 tradie business owners build a business that successfully generates profit and provides for a great lifestyle. The step-by-step framework educates and guides business owners how to successfully make the transition off the tools and onto the business by working smarter not harder. The four stages of the Blueprint for Success framework are Clarity, Control, Confidence and Connection, and these stages also form the framework for this book. The first part of the book looks at the five most common mistakes tradies make, including giving into what I've termed the 'tradie mindset syndrome', working harder not smarter and avoiding change.

The next four parts of the book are aligned with the four stages of the Blueprint for Success framework. Here's a

rundown of what each part focuses on, and how each stage leads to the next:

- *Clarity:* The important question a business owner must ask is, ‘What must the business deliver my family to ensure the investment provides adequate returns?’ In other words, what is the longer term vision or objective of the business? With clear vision comes clarity relating to what the business must stand for in terms of culture, behaviour, values and beliefs. I sum all this up with ‘the way we do it here’ – the non-negotiable operating DNA of the business. With this clarity comes focused effort, which in turn guarantees profit goals are achieved through the business investing in the right systems and attracting the right type of customer and team members.
- *Control:* Clarity helps you identify the key areas of the business that must be recorded and reported on, on a regular basis. If a process cannot be reported on, it cannot be measured. Without measurement, you can’t control the business. This part helps you identify the required reporting tools and measurement to give you the necessary control across finances, marketing, team and processes. Put simply, like any sporting team, you need to check the scoreboard and review your stats to understand what areas are working or not working. This knowledge drives continual performance improvement, a prerequisite for survival in the competitive and brutal landscape all businesses operate in today.
- *Confidence:* With control comes the confidence to make educated decisions quickly. You don’t experience procrastination, second guessing or, importantly, lack of belief. Confidence gives you the power to make great decisions. Your decision-making framework relates to how to price for profit, when to hire and fire, when to say no to dodgy customers, and when to reinvest into the business. Your confidence then flows

through the entire business into team members, customers, suppliers and partners. All stakeholders have the confidence and the belief that the business will deliver a consistent customer experience and a consistent financial return.

- *Connection:* Businesses that radiate confidence attract great opportunities and great partnerships. Once you have mastered clarity, control and confidence, you can position your business to leverage social and community networks, industry events and partnerships. With connection comes the opportunity to become a key person of influence in your chosen market – the expert, the go-to person. This attraction is possible because the business is making a positive contribution back into the community.

Adding to my business experiences and learnings, my company also conducted extensive research of 466 trade service and construction business owners, using our ‘Score Your Business’ assessment. Businesses researched included plumbing, gas fitting, electrical, building, air-conditioning, refrigeration, tiling, landscaping, plastering, and motor mechanics. This research enriched my understanding of what factors contribute to a blueprint for success. Ultimately, I wanted to identify and confirm the key processes and systems that, if implemented correctly, would guarantee the business owner achieved their personal goals. The findings from this research, which supported my belief relating to what constitutes business success, formed the basis for writing this book. The findings from this research in specific areas are shared throughout the book.

In my business, I’ve chosen to partner with organisations that, like me, want their customers to be successful in business and in life. The partners I choose need to see themselves as being able to add value to their customers’ businesses, rather than seeing themselves as simply suppliers of boxes filled with widgets.

Reece (plumbing and building suppliers), Telstra (through their Trades Assist work management software system), and Burson Auto Parts (auto mechanical suppliers) are some of the premium brands I work with that are willing to invest in their customers' business education to enable improved performance, assisting customers throughout their business journey to become more productive and profitable.

These organisations understand the necessity of transitioning from a traditional 'customer-supplier transaction' to a 'business partnership relationship', moving away from being a simple supplier of boxes filled with widgets, to becoming a vested partner creating win-win partnerships for all.

Through partnering with these organisations, I have had the opportunity to communicate our Blueprint for Success message and framework to tens of thousands of business owners. I also share case studies from these partnerships through this book.

MY VISION TO GUARANTEE SUCCESS

My vision is that every business should have the opportunity to be successful. The problem for tradie business owners is often that they 'don't know what they don't know' in relation to understanding what it takes to build a successful business. My aim is to create a lightbulb moment for all tradie business owners so they can, firstly, see what is required to be successful at business and, secondly, understand how they can be successful at business.

My philosophy is simple: with the right thinking and the right business intelligence I believe no business should fail. In other words, with the right thinking, the right business information can be interpreted to make great decisions to guarantee a profitable, sustainable business.

I am passionate about making positive change and playing a part in assisting business owners to improve the overall professionalism

within the construction and trade service industry. The more professional a business's operations are, the greater the chance of financial success, the greater the opportunity to contribute to the community and, ultimately, the greater the quality of life for all.

This book is designed to build your knowledge and understanding as you work through each stage of the Blueprint for Success framework. Each stage builds on the previous stage to assist you in developing the Clarity, Control, Confidence and Connection you need to build a great business and give yourself a great life.

As a business owner, your duty is to be successful, so don't settle for mediocrity. Get excited about being more successful than you could ever imagine.

PART I

The five great mistakes made by tradies

Over the course of my 25-year business journey, I have identified five common mistakes made by many tradie business owners. These mistakes limit the performance of the business, reducing profit and cash flow and often leading to business failure. Operating a successful tradie business in the information and technology age we now live in requires a new level of thinking and awareness.

Our goal as business owners is to build a profitable and sustainable business that satisfies our personal goals for decades. To achieve this, you must not submit to the traditional way of thinking – where you only need to work hard on the tools and, by default, the business will be successful. You must be aware of your operating mindset to ensure you do not create a job for yourself where everything revolves around you. This leads to being busy all the time, increased stress and a lack of motivation.

When you are operating in this state, you are constantly putting out fires to survive the day, with no thought given to the long term. Your focus is all about working hard to get a lot of tasks done, rather than working intelligently to get the right tasks done. Work often comes down to quantity over quality due to a lack of focus and priorities. Everything appears urgent and important. Any potential change within the business is avoided because operating the business has become hard enough without adding to the work load.

Do not mistake activity for productivity. You may be spinning faster and faster on the hamster wheel, but you are not moving towards achieving your personal goals.



CHAPTER 1

Submitting to the 'Tradie Mindset Syndrome'

DON'T BECOME ENSLAVED TO THE JOB

I still remember the excitement of receiving the business cards for my first business. I was very proud to be going it alone. I was sick of working hard making money for other people, and I was over having to answer to other people. I thought that because I was good on the tools and I knew how to solve a lot of plumbing problems, I would instantly be financially rewarded. This was my chance to earn a lot of money and have personal freedom. Or so I thought.

I was highly motivated when I started my business. I said yes to everyone who knocked on my door. I tested my hand at new types of work and new types of clients. A lot of the time I was learning on the run, and I made a lot of mistakes that cost me a lot of money – for example, underestimating the required labour hours,

underestimating the required materials, incorrectly installing systems or incorrectly hiring people. These mistakes resulted in me having to work harder to make up for the loss of money and loss of time. Because I was losing money my bank balance was constantly in the red, meaning I had no cash flow. Unbeknown to me at the time, I was infected with what I have termed the ‘tradie mindset syndrome’.

Cap in hand is fatal

Having no money in the bank meant I was under constant pressure to do more work. The bills were piling up fast. I owed my suppliers, had payments due for my car lease, phone, wages, and the list goes on. I didn’t care what I was charging for the job, I just had to win the job. I was often going ‘cap in hand’ to builders and property managers, asking for any work they could give me. This was a huge mistake, and one that is common to many tradies.

When you go ‘cap in hand’, you are basically on your knees begging for work. For a business owner, this is a fatal position. You are stressed, often unable to sleep. Your decision-making is poor, due to all the decisions you make being reactive to the current situation. Every decision is based on surviving today, and you can give little to no thought to the potentially negative impact this decision will have on the business next week, next month or next year.

This is one of the first symptoms of the ‘tradie mindset syndrome’: the business owner is operating in survival mode, week to week, month to month, year to year. If you’re in this mode, you’re operating like a fire chief putting out fires, where everything is important and everything is urgent. Nothing ever gets done to a great standard, the client experience changes day to day, clients never receive great service, and team members come and go. Action is incorrectly mistaken for productivity and profit.

When you’re operating like this, your business quickly becomes irrelevant in today’s market. You never become known as the expert

in solving a particular problem, and your business never 'wows' clients. Your business doesn't create brand advocates – those customers who proactively promote the business – and doesn't inspire team members. Your business never attracts great talent or business partners, and always competes on price.

Inadvertently, when you're operating from within the tradie mindset syndrome, you've become enslaved to the job. You can't step away from the business because everything revolves around you. Rather than creating a business that serves you in delivering profit and lifestyle, you've created a job that's suffocating you.

Everything revolves around you as the business owner. Every day I speak with owners who state they are burnt out, tired and frustrated because they can't step away from the business. If they step away, the business stops. At this stage, they ultimately realise they don't have a business at all. They just have a job.

All this is a result of the tradie mindset syndrome, characterised by the following thinking:

- I only need to be good on the tools and the business will be successful.
- I only have to work hard to get ahead financially.
- The busier I am, the more profit I will be making.
- I do not have time to plan my future; my priority is to get the job done.
- I do not have time to review my financial performance; my priority is to get the job done.
- I must say yes to every customer.
- I must calculate my price to ensure I win the work.
- I am focused on turnover and do not consider profit.
- My business is different from all others.
- I can do it alone.

This way of thinking quickly turns the excitement of creating a new business – created to provide personal and financial freedom – into a nightmare of frustrations. As the owner, you're quickly trapped like a hamster on the wheel – spinning faster and faster, but not going anywhere. Starting work in the early hours of the morning and finishing the paperwork late every night after the kids are in bed. Quality family time happens less and less, and family holidays are not a priority (or not even possible). Even when physically at home, you're not present in mind, because you're constantly thinking about the job.

The real horror of the situation presents itself when, after all that hard work, your accountant calculates what you owe to the taxman – and you have absolutely no money in the bank to pay the tax bill. This is not fun. This is not a business. This has no future. And the realisation sets in that you've created a job you are enslaved to. I liken this situation to driving a car at night in the pitch black with no lights, unaware you are driving next to a cliff.

Knowing what your time is worth

When calculating the huge number of hours you invest in spinning the wheel of your business, you need to take into account all activities – including time invested in quoting on and setting up the job, getting the team organised, travelling, completing the job, invoicing the job, paying the wages, paying suppliers, hiring and firing, and following up outstanding payments. When measuring the total hours invested against the actual money earned, I have calculated some business owners' financial returns can be as low as \$10 per hour.

When viewing your financial return, you also need to consider the level of financial investment required, and the associated risk in undertaking the chosen work. Here lies the real problem: your required financial return as the business owner, based on the level

of investment, is rarely, if ever, considered. Why? Because from the start your only consideration was getting away from working a job created by someone else, and working a job created by you. I repeat, work a job created by you. This is all about the job, which focuses on turnover, not about the business – which focuses on financial return on investment.

It is at this stage, however, the business is on life support. You're tired and not sure how long you can keep going. Every day feels like groundhog day, over and over. You often have little to show for all the blood, sweat and tears you've invested. The bank balance is not where it should be. The level of your personal savings and investment is not where it should be. The number of family holiday and adventure memories is not where it should be.

Understanding the risks when operating a business

When the business is on life support, the next step for most tradie business owners is to shut the doors. Depending on where you source statistics from, between 60 and 80 per cent of trade and construction businesses fail or shut down within the first five years of starting out. This is an incredibly daunting figure – especially when you consider that during that first five-year period the business owner commonly went through periods of not drawing a regular wage. During this period, the business owner invested vast amounts of time and money. By the time the business owner shuts the doors after running out of energy and cash, they are highly likely to have not broken even on their investment.

You need to think of your business as any investment – whether the investment be property, shares or your business, you require a financial return on top of the initial investment based on the level of risk exposure. And when it comes to operating a business, the risk exposure is high.

Score Your Business:

How satisfied are business owners?

As mentioned in the Introduction, I asked 466 trades and construction business owners to complete my ‘Score Your Business’ assessment to gain a greater understanding of the level of satisfaction among business owners in relation to financial return and lifestyle.

The high-level findings relating to business owner satisfaction based on level of turnover and years of operation are shown in the following tables and analysis.

Level of turnover

The breakdown of businesses that participated in the assessment based on annual turnover is shown in the following table.

<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>As % of total</i>
Less than \$300K	245	53%
\$300K–\$600K	112	24%
\$600K–\$1M	59	13%
More than \$1M	50	11%
Total	466	100%

The key point to note from the preceding table is that 53 per cent of participating businesses had less than \$300,000 turnover annually.

The assessment then looked at business owner’s levels of satisfaction, with the question, ‘Are you satisfied that you are achieving your personal goals? (Such as lifestyle, income, debt levels, working hours and stress level.)’ The following table shows satisfaction levels based on turnover breakdowns.

Submitting to the 'Tradie Mindset Syndrome'

<i>Turnover</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>As % of category total</i>
Less than \$300K	72	29%
\$300K–\$600K	27	24%
\$600K–\$1M	11	19%
More than \$1M	12	24%
Total	122	26%

The key points here are:

- Overall, only 26 per cent of business owners are satisfied that they are achieving their personal goals relating to lifestyle choices, financial position, and pressure levels. This means a huge 74 per cent of business owners are not satisfied in what their business is currently delivering to their personal lives. Increasing turnover doesn't increase the level of satisfaction.
- Only 24 per cent of business owners turning over greater than \$1,000,000 are satisfied that they are achieving their personal goals. This is fewer than the 26 per cent overall who are satisfied. This highlights that, as the business grows, the owner is drowning in the day-to-day tasks due to a lack of understanding relating to the administrative processes and systems required to deliver the increased workload.

Years of operation

The breakdown of businesses that participated in the assessment based on years of operation is shown in the following table.

<i>Years operating</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>As % of total</i>
Fewer than 1	105	23%
1	24	5%
1–3	103	22%
3–5	57	12%
More than 5	176	38%
Total	466	100%

The key point here is that 38 per cent of respondents have been operating for greater than five years.

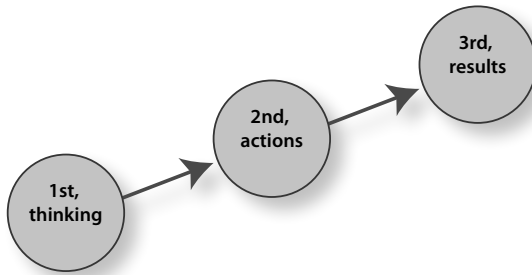
The following table breaks down responses to the question on owner satisfaction ('Are you satisfied that you are achieving your personal goals? Such as lifestyle, income, debt levels, working hours and stress level.') based on years operating.

<i>Years operating</i>	<i>Satisfied</i>	<i>As % of category total</i>
Fewer than 1	43	41%
1	7	29%
1 to 3	25	24%
3 to 5	13	23%
More than 5	34	19%
Total	122	26%

The key point to note from the findings here is that as the length of time the owner has been operating their business increases, year on year, the level of satisfaction declines. For those business owners who have been operating for greater than five years, satisfaction levels dropped to only 19 per cent being satisfied. The longer the business operates, the more tired the owner becomes.

SATISFACTION STARTS WITH THINKING

Why are the business shutdown rates so high? Why are 74 per cent of business owners not satisfied? Why are 81 per cent of those business owners operating for more than five years not satisfied? To a large part, these results are because of mindset. The owner is operating in the wrong mindset. Mindset dictates your thinking. Your thinking directs your actions. Your actions drive your results.



When I state this to my clients, their first reaction is usually push back. ‘My business isn’t underperforming because of my mindset,’ they might say. ‘My business is underperforming due to the economy being down’ – or government regulation adding costs to operate the business, stiff competition, clients being all about price, suppliers being too expensive, not being able to find the right team members, accountants providing poor advice, the newspapers stating doom and gloom. The list goes on and on.

What we have here is the ‘tradie mindset syndrome’ talking. *I am the victim in all this, it is not my fault.* Get over it and make a choice to instead adopt a ‘business performance mindset’. Business owners who operate in the business performance mindset build great businesses, no matter what they are facing in their operating environment.

Businesses that consistently perform at high levels are the direct result of the business owner operating in a business performance mindset. Great businesses consistently deliver a great financial

return, offer a great lifestyle of choice, and are great contributors to the community. This is achieved despite what is going on around them.

View of the world

Why is mindset so critical? Because it determines how you view the world. Look at the following table to test how you currently view the world. What lens do you view the world through?

Situation	Tradie mindset syndrome view	Business performance mindset view
Approach to business	Job that is a means to an end	Business is an investment that must deliver a financial return
Submitting a quote with no future jobs in the pipeline	Price to win the work; will cut corners when needed	Price for profit with no short cuts – do not compromise
Business is underperforming	Have an external focus and believe performance is out of my control	Have an internal focus and understand performance is controllable
Desired success not yet achieved	The goal is the destination and when I get there only then will I be happy	Understand business is a journey and success is defined by who you become
Hiring and retaining great team members is hard	Ignore the issue and simply put it down to not being able to find anyone like me	Learn to understand why this is happening – develop brand and people solutions
Meeting a customer to follow up a quote	See it as an obligation and not having the time to waste	See it as an opportunity to build a relationship – ensure the best solution is provided

Submitting to the 'Tradie Mindset Syndrome'

Situation	Tradie mindset syndrome view	Business performance mindset view
Arriving to a new job	Think about transaction only and completing the job as quickly as possible to go to next job	Think partnership and understanding customer's needs to convert to a lifetime client
Investing in the business	Fear of failure due to short-term thinking; cannot see value in the investment	100% belief that it is the right decision for the business's long-term success
Requiring assistance to grow the business	Want to go it alone, thinking that no-one else can understand the business	Understand importance of having a support team of external parties to safely guide the business

Even if you're predominately viewing the world through the lens of the tradie mindset syndrome, your mindset can always change. Once you understand that your decision-making and your performance are a result of your subconscious thinking, you can begin to consciously think differently.

The aim of this book is to turn the lights on for business owners, getting you out of the dark of the past and into the light of future opportunity. Once you understand the business performance mindset, you are on the path to building a great business. Based on my life and business experiences, I believe this to be true 100 per cent.

History lesson: Global financial crisis

Before the global financial crisis (GFC) in 2008, everything was great. Most business owners had no need to worry, with lots of work rolling in and easy money. Business was easy. So a lot of business owners became complacent, taking their eyes off the wheel while the business was steering its own course. They didn't need to check

the performance of the business because money was easy to come by. Besides, if they became short of cash the banks were giving it away.

Then the GFC hit with a bang. *Shit, I didn't see that coming*, was what most business owners thought. The economy was busted. Business models were busted. Thinking was busted. Carnage everywhere, with huge financial, social and moral costs. Why did this happen? For most tradie business owners, it was because they were operating with their heads in the 'tradie mindset syndrome' cloud, thinking that the good times would roll on forever.

Learn from history: booms and busts will always occur. Those business owners operating with a business performance mindset are preparing for the next bust. They take nothing for granted. They are preparing their business to weather the storm that will hit some time in the future. They are preparing their business to be resilient. They are preparing their business to be sustainable well into the future.

PATH OF LEAST RESISTANCE

Humans will always take the path of least resistance. It's in our make-up. If we're faced with a choice, we'll most likely take the easier option. For a tradie, the easy option is to focus on the job. When faced with the choice between spending time reviewing the financial numbers of the business and doing the job, doing the job always wins. When faced with the choice to either spend time creating a plan that will guarantee long-term success or doing the job, doing the job always wins.

Why? Because doing the job comes easy; it is what a tradie is good at, it is natural. It is the path of least resistance. Working on the business is new, and does not come naturally. Doing the business thing is hard. Choosing the path of least resistance, however, is 'tradie mindset syndrome' thinking.

As a business owner, you must be operating in the business performance mindset to challenge the path of least resistance. The business performance mindset ensures owners make the tough calls – tough calls that will create short-term pain, but deliver long-term profitable gain. This way of thinking understands that taking the easy options in life leads to fool's gold.

In *The Ultimate Blueprint for an Insanely Successful Business*, Keith Cunningham frames the basic difference between the tradie mindset syndrome and the business performance mindset. Cunningham states great operators get tired while great business owners get rich. Your choice: do you want to be a great operator or a great business owner?

Your takeaways

- 1. Look out for tradie mindset syndrome thinking – instead, operate with business performance mindset thinking.**
- 2. Focus on your desired financial return of investment, rather than focusing on being busy.**
- 3. Understand your mindset determines your view of the world and your actions – and that you can consciously change your mindset.**
- 4. Avoid the path of least resistance, and instead choose short-term pain for long-term gain.**



CHAPTER 2

Working hard rather than intelligently

MY STORY

When running a trade service business, it is very easy to work hard. Yes, I am saying working hard is easy. We are taught from the moment we commence an apprenticeship that the job is all about hard work. Keep your head down, work hard, ask no questions. This becomes ingrained into the way we operate, part of our DNA; our focus is on getting a lot done in a day. As we progress to a tradesman and then venture into our own business, we are hardwired into thinking that if we are busy all day, we must be productive. Wrong.

Why do I believe this is wrong? Because this kind of thinking leads to too many tradie businesses failing. In my plumbing business, I was mentally stuck in the tradie mindset syndrome of working hard at all costs. Thinking that I had to have a lot of work – any work – on all the time. Thinking that I needed to keep the boys busy, no matter what. Thinking that being busy and working hard

all the time is the only way to financially get ahead. Thinking that I couldn't afford to spend time in the office to understand where we are making money or losing money. Crazy.

Here I was thinking that I could not stop for even one day to analyse the performance of the business. I felt guilty if I wasn't onsite with our team, in the grind, getting the job done. Dig up, lay the sewer, lay the stormwater, back fill. Strip the roof, lay the new roof. Strip a house, rough in, fit off. At all times, I felt I needed to be shoulder to shoulder with the boys because I wanted to lead from the front. When faced with a choice, I took the path of least resistance and jumped into the job.

The problem for me was that I became so invested in the job that I had no idea which type of work generated the most profit. I didn't know which clients generated the most profit. I worked for commercial property managers, residential builders, real estate agents, government and the local Mr and Mrs Jones. Because my goal was to be busy, getting things done, I viewed every job and every client the same. I couldn't prioritise my time effectively, I didn't know which customers to say no to, I had no idea what the business really stood for, and I had no idea which direction to take the business.

I found working hard to get a lot of things done the easy part of running the business. Operating in the 'fire chief' mode, where everything is urgent and important, was easy for me. Reacting to every phone call that came through was easy. The hard part was saying no. The hard part was slowing down to review, measure and analyse the performance of the business.

With this type of information, what I now call your business scorecard, I could have made educated business decisions. Yes, I knew that if I had this information I could work more intelligently by the simple fact I would be making better quality decisions. Again, your aim is to do the most amount of intelligent work, not simply the most amount of work.

However, I found working intelligently very hard for several reasons. To start with, I didn't know how to record, collate or report the required information. I didn't have the financial intelligence to then understand and interpret the information. Finally, I thought focusing on this area was a waste of time because if I wasn't onsite I couldn't charge myself out and therefore it was costing me money.

Becoming a more effective leader

Stephen Covey, in his bestseller *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, explains working intelligently as 'sharpening the saw'. Covey shares the story of the woodcutter who, on his first day, cuts down 18 trees. His boss, who pays well and provides good working conditions, encourages the woodcutter to keep up the good work, and the woodcutter is motivated to do so. His tally each day, however, begins to decrease, even though he is working harder. The woodcutter goes to his boss to apologise. His boss responds as follows:

'When was the last time you sharpened your axe?' the boss asked.

'Sharpen? I had no time to sharpen my axe. I have been very busy trying to cut trees ...'

Covey states that our lives are like this. We sometimes get so busy that we don't take time to sharpen the 'saw' (or in the case of the woodcutter in the preceding story, sharpen the axe). In today's world, it seems that everyone is busier than ever, but less happy than ever. Why is that? Could it be that we have forgotten how to stay 'sharp'? Nothing is wrong with activity and hard work. However, we all need time to relax, to think and meditate, and to learn and grow. If we don't take the time to sharpen the 'saw', we will become dull and lose our effectiveness.

In the context of operating a business, sharpening the saw relates to your effectiveness as a leader, the quality of your systems, and the motivation levels of your team. As a leader, you must continually

sharpen your decision-making process through investing the time to ensure all financial, job and customer data is accurate and up to date. With quality information and data, you must then collate and report your results into a scoreboard. Your scoreboard allows you to analyse your performance, highlighting which areas of your business require ‘sharpening’.

THE CONCEPT OF A SCORECARD

The facts showing how your business is operating become your scorecard. With a scorecard, you can quickly see where you are making money and losing money. Your scorecard highlights the areas where the ‘saw’ needs to be sharpened, where investment is required to upgrade the saw, and the areas where the saw needs to be scrapped all together. Simply, the scorecard shows you what is working and what not is working.

I know what you are thinking: *That’s great but how do I create my scoreboard?* In my business, I developed ‘The CUBE’, which is a business intelligence software platform that empowers business owners and operators by delivering real-time business intelligence by way of looking at all sides of the business at once. The CUBE aims to provide business owners with instant, complete business information by analysing current job data, accounts data, individual data and customer data all at once. This current data is measured against performance targets, which then calculates the business’s predicted results. The CUBE is also designed to enable real-time proactive decision-making through identifying the priority tasks and directing what action needs to be taken. The CUBE provides business owners with Clarity amid the chaos of running the day-to-day operations (covered in part II of this book), with Control through detailed measurement and analysis to ensure the business is performing as planned (part III), and with the Confidence to make the right decisions required to position the business for long-term success (part IV).

I discuss the ideas that were behind the development of The CUBE software throughout this book, and how you can focus on the same areas to create your scorecard and so improve your data analysis and decision-making. At this point, it is important to understand that an accurate and up-to-date scorecard is the key to working intelligently. Through parts II to V of this book, we will work through the steps required to build your scoreboard to commence working intelligently ‘on the business’, and less ‘on the tools’.

STAND BACK AND OBSERVE

As a business leader, if you do not sharpen the saw, your individual performance and decision-making will become dull and ineffective. This will translate into your team’s performance being dull and ineffective, resulting in a poorly performing business. Think about this: why do professional sporting teams review every play, review every decision and review every player after every game? Because the coach knows he (or she) needs to know the areas to improve if they are to compete next game, or if they are to compete for the championship. The coach understands their role is not to be on the field with the players to help kick, pass or tackle. The coach’s role is to observe, reflect, review and compare performance so they can discuss and collaborate with the team where, why and how they need to sharpen the saw.

Early in Sir Alex Ferguson’s coaching career, before he became the most successful football coach in history while guiding Manchester United, he spent most of his time being hands-on, training the players on the field. In Ferguson’s book *Leading*, he explains his transition from the pitch to the stands, acknowledging that a more distant observer can sometimes see the bigger picture better than a coach on the field. Ferguson talks about his initial reluctance to delegate on-field training to his assistant manager, but came to realise it was the ‘best thing’ he ever did:

It didn't take away my control. My presence and ability to supervise were always there, and what you can pick up by watching is incredibly valuable. Once I stepped out of the bubble, I became more aware of a range of details, and my performance level jumped. Seeing a change in a player's habits or a sudden dip in his enthusiasm allowed me to go further with him: Is it family problems? Is he struggling financially? Is he tired? What kind of mood is he in? Sometimes I could even tell that a player was injured when he thought he was fine.

I don't think many people fully understand the value of observing. I came to see observation as a critical part of my management skills. The ability to see things is key or, more specifically, the ability to see things you don't expect to see.

OLYMPIC LESSONS

When I was growing up in Maroubra I aspired to be an Olympian. My goal was to represent Australia in sprint kayak paddling. I knew I had to work hard. I knew I had to get up early. I knew I had to paddle over 150 kilometres per week. I knew I had to lift tonnes of weights per gym session. I knew I had to cross-train with running, riding and swimming. I knew I had to keep my body in shape with stretching and yoga. Through working hard my times improved, I got on the medal dais at the Australian Championships, and I represented Australia. However, working hard alone was not enough to achieve my dream of becoming an Olympian.

I got caught up in doing the 'what' – in other words, simply ticking boxes. Ticking off sessions per week, ticking off kilometres churned out on the water, ticking off tonnes lifted in the gym. I thought that if I just kept ticking the 'what' boxes, I would continue to improve. Simple – just keep doing more of the same. Over time when I noticed my times were getting slower my fallback position was to work harder. Get up earlier, do more sessions, and increase

the length of these sessions. More of the ‘what’. Unfortunately, this didn’t help my performance. I ended up becoming fatigued and sick due to the lack of rest and recovery.

My quest

Not until after failing to realise my Olympic dream and finally hanging up my paddle did I start to reflect on my performances. I started asking questions. Why did I miss out and why did others with the same ability as me make selection? I entered into a quest to understand what it takes to consistently perform at a great level. What it takes to climb the Everest of winning an Olympic gold medal, and then return to the summit four years later.

I spent two years picking the brain of a former Hungarian Olympic coach. Hungarians, along with Germans, are the dominate powerhouses of sprint kayak paddling, consistently delivering gold medals at every Olympics. I studied Tudor Bompa, regarded as the ‘godfather of periodisation training’ – which focuses on planning training cycles that will guarantee peak performance at the right times. I began testing and measuring my learnings with the squad of athletes I was coaching. One of the athletes I coached was Tate Smith, who went on to win an Olympic gold medal at the 2012 London Olympic Games.

Rather than direct these athletes on ‘what’ to do, I wanted to empower them through helping them understand ‘why’ they were doing it. This was a huge shift – away from the traditional coaching model of just ‘do what I say’, toward intelligent coaching through empowering the athlete to think about ‘why’ they were doing what they were doing.

During this period, I noted that for most athletes, again, working hard is very easy. It is part of their DNA. It is who they are. Working hard is what has allowed them to achieve a level of success – be it in local, national or international competition. Working hard

is what comes naturally. For the most part, the athlete doesn't have to think too hard, just do 'what' the coach says.

However, to achieve a greater level of success, or to maintain a level of success, you must ask 'why'. Why am I doing this session? Why is this session important to achieving my long-term goal? Why is rest important?

At this point I realised athletes find stopping and questioning 'why' hard. It is far simpler to continue working hard on the 'what'. This is their path of least resistance. I framed this as 'training hard is easy; training intelligently is hard.' Most athletes are unaware that they are stuck in this way of thinking. Most athletes mistake activity for productivity. To me, productivity is making forward progress toward achieving the goal. Just doing a lot of training sessions doesn't guarantee the athlete will move toward their goals.

Intelligent operator

Lachlan Tame is to me an example of what training intelligently looks like. Lachlan Tame represented Australia at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games, winning a bronze medal in the K2 1000-metre event (K2 refers to a two-man kayak). Lachlan partnered with Ken Wallace in the event. In the final at the Olympic Games, eight nations were lined up in their respective lanes, looking straight down the 1000-metre course. Each of the finalists had a different story for how they ended up on the start line, but each had invested the last four years to perform at their peak at this very moment in time. They had invested lots of hard work, and endured lots of ups and downs. Now it was down to this one race.

I began coaching Lachlan in 2008 when he was an ocean surf ski paddler competing at Surf Life Saving competitions. In 2010 Lachlan began to dip his toe into the water of flatwater kayak paddling. (Ocean surf ski paddlers commonly cross-over to flatwater kayak paddling, and vice versa.) Flatwater kayak paddling requires

greater endurance and solid technique because competitors receive no assistance from the ocean. By 2011, after winning the Australian surf ski championship, Lachlan made a commitment to represent Australia at the Olympics in 2016. His Olympic journey had begun.

Intelligent planning had also begun. Based on Lachlan's skills, capacity and experience, planning had to be focused on the key areas critical to him achieving team selection in five years' time, 2016. This related to developing an intelligent training program, required to build technique, strength and speed endurance. He also required the right training environment with regards to culture, training partners, support coaches and financial support.

Finally, the most important aspect to achieving peak performance was having a 'performance mindset'. A performance mindset empowers athletes to design a personalised peak performance process, visualise peak performance and compete at peak performance when it counts.

In 2012, four years prior to the 2016 Olympics, Lachlan's strength was his raw speed and ability to race – both key areas required to compete at international competition – but these were not enough for him to succeed at international level. Lachlan had to focus on building his technique, team boat skills, and increase his endurance capacity.

It's all about the 'why'

In Lachlan's words this is how he approached training intelligently four years out from when he needed to peak at Rio in 2016:

When I had an endurance session, often 24 kilometres or two hours plus of paddling, I focused on performing every stroke technically correct. I had to have 100 per cent concentration. I wanted to improve each stroke. I wasn't out there to go fast or race anyone else. I was in my zone and no one else mattered. I knew 'why' I was

doing this session some four years (1460 days) before Rio. I had clarity knowing that if I get it right today, then when it counts in Rio, my technique will hold together when under pressure with 250 metres to go and fatigue setting in.

Through intelligent training and asking the right ‘why’ questions, I would finish a session far more mentally exhausted, rather than just physically tired. I found mental exhaustion far more taxing; it is easy to just paddle 24 kilometres. I have witnessed competitors paddle 24 kilometres as hard as they possibly can. Flat out, physically spent. However, not for one second has thought been given as to why they are doing this session. Not one question has been considered relating to why or how this session will impact performance on the chosen day in Rio. They have only focused on the doing the 24 kilometres (the ‘what’) as hard as possible so they can tick the box, session done. My aim is when I line up to compete I have done the most amount of intelligent work, not simply the most amount of work.

That’s how I see most competitors, just ticking boxes. Over time this results in stagnant or declining performances. When the focus is simply to train hard and tick boxes, you quickly roll from session to session, day to day, week to week, never really understanding the process required to deliver peak performance when it counts. Basically, there is a lack of learning, and this results in the athlete repeating the wrong behaviours that are contributing to a decline in performance.

ALWAYS LEARNING

What separates athletes and businesses owners who consistently perform at an elite level from everyone else? Elite performers in sport and business all learn from every performance. They review the process and identify what areas require improving – and,

importantly, they apply the new process. This becomes a continuous cycle of learn, think, apply and so on.

As a business leader, your goal is to build a great business, with a great team, delivering great financial and lifestyle rewards. You cannot afford to make the mistake of being stuck on the job site with your team. You must get out of the ‘just work hard’ mentality. You must fully appreciate and understand the power of a scoreboard, the power of sharpening your saw, the power of observation, the power of trusting your team and the power of working intelligently. If you truly believe in this, you are on the pathway to success.

Your takeaways

- 1. Identify the areas in your business that require sharpening – do not mistake activity for productivity.**
- 2. Develop your scoreboard to measure performance – business intelligence drives educated decision-making.**
- 3. Before doing a task, ask yourself why you are doing it – don’t get caught up simply ticking boxes.**



CHAPTER 3

Not bringing your 'A-Game'

LEARN THE RULES OF THE GAME

Business is a game and to be successful you need to know the rules of the game. Throughout this book I make reference to a key rule in the game of business known as your 'A-Game'. In the game of business your A-Game is a critical factor in determining your success or failure. If you really want to build a great business that serves you in providing a great lifestyle, following the A-Game rule is non-negotiable. The rule is simple: you must bring your A-Game to everything you do. Most businesses fail due to the business owner's lack of quality and lack of detail when doing tasks.

A-Game relates to the level of focused energy and detail invested to complete a task. A-Game begins with you as the business owner. When you bring your A-Game to every task, your team will follow. And I mean every task, not every second task.

For me, A-Game is an important value I live by. I use this to sense check whether the task is worth doing or not. This check highlights if the task at hand will generate value for the team, my clients and my business. If I am not prepared to bring my A-Game to a task, it is not a priority, and so I push it aside.

What does A-Game look like? The following table compares the difference between Other-Games and A-Game through looking at the tasks the business owner must complete during the course of a job.

Task	Other-Games	A-Game
Create quote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited to no review and research • No double-checking calculations • Complete last minute 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Complete review and research of scope, specifications, solution alternatives, deliverables • Triple-check calculations • Complete well before due date
Submit quote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Email quote • Often delivered after the due date 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call before due date to confirm quote will be sent on time • Ask to confirm the requirements of the quote submission • Arrange a meeting to confirm solutions meet the required scope • Hand deliver or email quote on time
Follow-up quote	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No follow up 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Call to ensure quote was received if emailed or posted • Conduct meeting to confirm solutions meet the required scope • Discuss potential alternative solutions

Not bringing your 'A-Game'

Task	Other-Games	A-Game
Prior to job commencement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Very limited planning and no team meeting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Detailed planning and preparation to confirm capacity and deployment of resources • Conduct team meeting to communicate job stage deliverables and timelines – setting clear expectations and accountability
Commence job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No tracking of actual progress versus quoted • Client meetings are conducted on the run, ad-hoc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Track actual progress against material and labour allowances for each stage • Conduct regular scheduled meetings with client throughout the job to confirm on scope
Complete job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers inconsistent results • Hit and miss with delivery • Often no money made from the job 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Delivers consistent results • On time and on scope • Client expectations exceeded • Profit targets achieved
Invoice job	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often invoicing not processed until well after completion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 100% of the time job invoiced at time of completion or milestone reached
Payment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Terms and conditions often lacking critical detail and not signed prior to commencement of job • Variations managed ad-hoc 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Clear terms and conditions signed off prior to commencing the job • Clear process to manage variations

UNDERSTANDING THE IMPORTANCE OF A-GAME

Why is A-Game important? A-Game relates to the 1 percenters that most people do not think are important. When you are 100 per cent committed to operating in the business performance mindset, A-Game dictates where you choose to spend your time. Simply, if the task is not worth bringing your A-Game to, don't do it. You only have one game period: A-Game. The business performance mindset owner understands the negative impact if Other-Games are brought to a task. The negative impact is not instant, but usually felt over time.

For a tradie business owner operating with the tradie mindset syndrome, jumping in to complete a task is easier than stopping and asking why this task is important to the business. Rather than contemplate the A-Game approach of investing time on prioritising a task to-do list, their goal is to get as many tasks done so they can be ticked off the list. They then feel a great sense of achievement because things are getting done and boxes are ticked. Wrong.

Herein lies why mindset is the key to achieving greatness in your life. The tradie mindset syndrome lulls you into a sense of mediocrity because you do not have a large enough view of the world. This mindset only provides a snapshot of what is to come, relating to today, tomorrow, next week and, if you're lucky, next month. This snapshot doesn't provide a larger view of the potential long-term impact today's decisions will have.

The following table shows some of the potential negative impacts resulting from bringing Other-Games to the task.

If you want to build a great business that dominates your market, bringing your A-Game is non-negotiable – for the owner, team members, suppliers and partners. A-Game is the way we do it here. All success follows A-Game. What game you bring is your choice.

Not bringing your 'A-Game'

Business situation	Bring Other-Game to task	Long-term outcome
Lots of jobs coming in – need more staff	Hire fast – lack of recruitment planning, lack of training, lack of performance review	Select wrong candidate – poor fit for the business, need to fire, costing time and money
Quotes piling up	Just get the quote done and submit it – job incorrectly scoped with incorrect specifications, job incorrectly priced	Jobs lose money, waste of time – less money in the bank
No money in the bank	Go 'cap in hand' looking for any type of job – even if not profitable	Jobs lose money, waste of time – less money in the bank
Running late to client meeting	Due to poor planning and preparation have no time to notify client running late	Client goes to competitor due to lack of professionalism – need to source new clients, which costs time and money
Meeting with accountant	Attend the meeting with no plan and no planned questions relating to information required to make better business decisions – sit waiting for answers	Poor meeting outcome resulting in inadequate recommendations, which costs time and money

PARTNERS MUST BRING THEIR A-GAME TOO

To be successful in business, your partners must follow the rules of the game and also bring their A-Game. By ‘partners’ here I mean your suppliers, accountants, bookkeepers, financial advisors, insurance brokers, finance brokers, consultants, coaches – and the list goes on.

Too often I have seen businesses fail because partners didn’t follow the rules. Too often these partners become lazy in bringing Other-Games to the table. Rather than seek to understand the real problem or research a better solution, they take the easy option of churning out the same information they provide to all their other customers. Too often, partners think it is acceptable to bring their Other-Game to the table because ‘a tradie won’t know any different’.

I have witnessed firsthand families losing their homes because partners provided the wrong recommendations. You must demand and expect all your partners to bring their A-Game. You are investing in them to deliver results. This is where, as a business owner, you must bring your A-Game when engaging prospective partners. You must ask great questions in relation to what past successes they have achieved with a business the same as yours. And you must ask how they will improve business performance, and how their A-Game will be delivered always.

From my own perspective, I need to have the best partners on board to ensure our vision is achieved. Our vision is to be the Olympic Champions at changing thinking and behaviour to improve tradie business performance. I need to know that my partners have the same vision, the same commitment to achieve this vision, and the same belief that we will achieve the vision.

I have partnered with Telstra, Reece and Burson because they have the same vision relating to improving their customer’s overall business performance. Due to our visions being aligned, I was engaged to influence their customers’ thinking and behaviour.

Your takeaways

- 1. If a task is not worth bringing your A-Game to, it's not worth doing at all.**
- 2. What areas of your business require your immediate A-Game? Uncover the process and system refinements that will improve long-term performance outcomes.**
- 3. Have all your partners signed up to the rules of the game? Remember – the only rule is to bring your A-Game.**



CHAPTER 4

Not having focus

BURN THE BOATS

When Alexander the Great, the world's greatest empire builder, arrived on the shores of Persia, his Greek army was overwhelmingly outnumbered. Yet he gave the orders to his men to burn the boats. As their only means of retreat went up in flames, legend has it that Alexander turned to his men and said, 'We go home in Persian ships, or we die'. No doubt this act was based on another of his quoted strongly held beliefs: 'There is nothing impossible to him who will try.' What followed was an extraordinary victory over an army that was in many ways superior.

This is not the only time in history that leaders have burnt their boats when faced with insurmountable odds. Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* brings to light the logic behind the decisions of history's greatest conquerors to burn their boats at the risk of being killed in enemy hands. Quite simply, doing so eradicates any notion of retreat from the minds of their troops and commits them unwaveringly to the cause – victory. Defeat isn't an option at all.

Nothing is like burning your boats to focus your mind on the one thing: the cause. The one thing is success. There is no plan B. What individuals and teams can achieve when backed into a corner with no other option than to fight is extraordinary. With no option of turning back, they have clear focus and are hungry to win; everything is laid bare on the line for the cause.

For me, closing my plumbing business in 1997 to venture into study and the corporate world was the burning of my boats. I was committed. There was no turning back. Because I had no plan B, I had to make it work. I had to find my way. It was the single most exciting thing I had done in my life. It was at that very point things became quiet. All the external noise faded. All the previous distractions disappeared. I now had one mission, and it was very clear. I was only focused on the tasks, people and thinking that would assist my cause.

THE PROBLEM WITH JACK OF ALL TRADES BUSINESSES

One of the main reasons tradie businesses struggle prior to failing is that the owner has no clear understanding on what their mission or cause is. This was the reason my plumbing business struggled. When you're operating in the tradie mindset syndrome, you think you must hedge your bets, just in case. You try everything. The business becomes a jack of all trades doing a lot of different types of work, but nothing is done great. Everything is completed just okay. Just okay means the customer easily forgets the business, and it has no 'wow' factor. Just okay means the customer expects a cheap price, no expert. Just okay means the customer won't refer the business, and feels no trust.

Lacking a vision

Jack of all trades businesses don't have a mission or vision to be known as the experts at a specific work type or client type. In

chapter 17 I discuss how becoming a master in knowing your clients' actual problem will set your business apart from your competitors. You can never become a master if you work for all different types of customers. Residential clients have different problems to that of commercial clients. Maintenance clients have different problems to that of construction clients.

Being controlled by fear

Owners of a jack of all trades business will never make the call to burn the boats due to fear. Fear that if they focus on a niche, the work will run out. Fear that if they focus, they might miss an opportunity. Fear that if they focus, they might not be good enough. Fear that if they focus and put it all on the line, they might fail. Overcoming this fear is the first step to building a great business that will serve the owner, as opposed to a jack of all trades business that enslaves the owner. Once this fear has been overcome, anything is possible.

ELITE FOCUS

Let's think elite sports performance – think how do Olympians burn their boats? As discussed in chapter 2, along with working with business owners in building performance-based businesses, I have also worked with athletes and sporting organisations to implement elite performance frameworks. I have had the great opportunity of mentoring multiple Olympic athletes, and assisting NRL head coach of the Rabbitohs, Michael Maguire, during 2014 when they broke a 43-year drought to claim the premiership.

It always disappoints me when I see an athlete or a team with great ability failing to reach their performance potential, and never achieving a high-level of success. Never winning games or races they should have won. All the while, athletes and teams with a lot less ability out-compete them at every play.

I always think this is such a wasted opportunity. But I also know this often comes with a lifetime of regret. Times when the individual will look into the mirror and ask the question, ‘What if?’ What if I had changed my environment or took it more seriously? Would the results have been different? The question continually runs through their minds, and especially every time they witness others celebrating the taste of success they missed out on.

Before they hand out the medals at an Olympic Games, every athlete must fight to earn their place on the team. Every aspiring athlete must focus every day, over a four-, six- or eight-year period to earn the right to call themselves an Olympian. I believe the difference between those who earn the right to call themselves an Olympian and those who miss out largely comes down to focus: the focus to overcome fear and burn their boats.

This is how aspiring Olympians burn their boats. This is how they back themselves into a corner with the only option to come out swinging. They climb a mountain top to shout out for all to hear:

In four years’ time I will be going to the Olympic Games. This is my discipline (for example, swimming), and this is my event (for example, 200-metres freestyle). For the next four years I will be investing my time, energy and thinking toward one thing. My mission is to make the Olympic team and win the Gold medal. I am putting myself out there. I am willing to sacrifice. I am laying it all on the line. There is no plan B. There is no retreat. I either make the team or I miss out. I need a support team on the same mission as me. I understand that I am opening myself up to criticism from others who will judge me from afar. I will perform at my best every day. The result will take care of itself. I will live with no excuses. I will live with no regrets.

As a business owner and leader, if you want to build a business and a team to perform at a consistent, elite level, do not sit on the fence. Stake your claim and shout out your intentions. Burn your boats.

Put it all on the line. Instil razor sharp focus. Do not live with regret. There is no such thing as failure.

One last word from two of the world's most successful businessmen. When Bill Gates first met Warren Buffett, their host at dinner, Gates's mother, asked everyone around the table to identify what they believed was the single most important factor in their success through life. Gates and Buffett gave the same one-word answer: Focus.

Your takeaways

1. **Define your one thing – what field, service or technology do you want to be known as the expert in?**
2. **Now use all your energy to focus on becoming this expert in your chosen field. What do you need to do to overcome your fear?**



CHAPTER 5

Avoiding change

CHANGE IS TOUGH – NOW GET ON WITH IT!

We all know making a change in your life is tough. Kicking bad habits is particularly hard. You may have read breaking bad habits only takes 21 days, also 28 days – no wait, it's actually 66 days – and on it goes. From my point of view, achieving change doesn't come down to a number of days; change comes down to desire. Change comes from the questions you ask yourself and, importantly, from how strongly you answer these questions. *How much do I really want to build an awesome business? How much am I truly willing to sacrifice to achieve my dreams? How hungry am I to create a life of abundance? Am I willing to burn my boats?* As successful college basketball coach Bobby Knight once said, 'The will to win is not nearly as important as the will to prepare to win. Everyone wants to win but not everyone wants to prepare to win.'

Be resilient and keep going

If you answered the preceding questions strongly in the affirmative to change, the true test comes the next morning – and the next week, the next month and the next year. Your response to this test comes down to your grit and persistence. Can you keep getting back up from the knocks, from all the doubters, and from your own self-doubt? Can you keep going when things are not going to plan? When things are taking longer than expected or when the finish line is not in sight?

When these kinds of tests appear, most people quit. At this point, most people think it is all too hard to change, and that all those people who said it couldn't be done were right. At this point most people think, *I am comfortable the way it is; I don't need to change.* And they convince themselves that it is okay not to chase their dream.

Change can be tough. Change can be scary. Change can push you out of your comfort zone. But change can also transform you as a person. When I looked in the mirror back in 1997 when my client and debt collector took me for \$33,000, I knew I had to change to become better at business. I was also fearful of the change I knew I had to undertake.

Yes, I was hungry, but I was also scared of the unknown. That was when I realised I had to trust myself that closing my business to commence study and gain experience in the corporate world was the right decision – even though I didn't know where to start.

Once I had burned my boats, you can imagine the comments that came next – when I told my staff, my clients and my mates that I was moving on from plumbing to studying business. The basic response was, 'Jonesy what the ... are you doing?'

I burned my boats again 10 years later in 2007 when, after gaining business skills, knowledge and experience, I quit the corporate world to start my own consulting business. I was ready to bring all

my learnings from study and corporate experience back into the tradie space. My goal was to share with all tradies the ‘must-have’ knowledge required to be great at business.

This must-have business knowledge, found in abundance within the corporate space where performance is paramount, was not shared at trade school – where getting the job done is paramount. I aimed to change that. So there I was in 2007 with my new business venture, limited resources, one client, a young family, two mortgages and a very simple mission: make it work.

THE STRUGGLE MAKES YOU STRONG

Throughout my story of change, I had to trust my gut instinct to keep pushing through at many points. Times when I was struggling to get through the university workload and when I struggled to pass subjects. Times when I struggled to get a start in the corporate world because I was perceived as a plumber, rather than the business person I was willing to become. Times when I struggled to understand how the world of corporate politics worked because, as a tradie my previous focus had been on getting the job done, so I wasn’t prepared for all the bullshit that goes on in the corporate world. And times when I struggled to attract clients and even struggled to pay the bills.

This is when your grit and persistence will be tested. Looking back now, the struggles I faced throughout my career provided the most important lessons in my life. They made me a stronger, more resilient person. Today when I am making change, or when things seem too hard or I lack belief, I draw on those previous experiences to provide me with the confidence to push on. I can tell myself it is okay, because I have been in this situation before and have prevailed.

The following parts in this book detail, step by step, how you can make positive change to build a great business that delivers

great profit and offers great lifestyle opportunities. However, a magic bullet doesn't exist. You have to apply focused effort to ensure change happens – it will not just happen. Things will take longer than expected and will be tougher than expected, because you have never done this before. You must believe in yourself. You must surround yourself with people who believe in you, and beware of the people who place their own fears onto you – asking, for example, what will happen if you fail. There is no such thing as failure if you have a go. The only failure is not starting.

World renowned motivational speaker Les Brown talks about the graveyard being the richest place on earth – because it is here that you will find all the hopes and dreams that were never fulfilled, the books that were never written, the songs that were never sung, the inventions that were never shared, the cures that were never discovered. All because someone was too afraid to take that first step to carry out their dream.

One last point to remember: you've likely heard the quote 'the definition of insanity is doing something over and over again and expecting a different result'. Widely attributed to Albert Einstein but more likely originating from the Narcotics Anonymous organisation in 1981, the main idea stands. If you're not happy with your current results, and therefore want better results, you need to change your thinking, activity and focus.

Now get on with it. Get started on your blueprint for success, first by mitigating the five mistakes limiting business performance as follows:

- operate in the 'business performance mindset'
- be prepared to work intelligently
- always bring your 'A-Game' to all tasks
- have razor sharp focus
- make change happen.

Your takeaways

- 1. The hardest step is the first step – get started now.**
- 2. Be prepared for a fight – if you get knocked down, get back up.**
- 3. Take small bites and chew fast.**