



by:

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Insights On Business and Life



Five best-selling authors, Speaker Hall of Fame recipients, internationally-acclaimed business consultants and best buddies give their insights on business and life

Who Are The Five Friends?



Larry Winget

Larry Winget is a bestselling author, television personality, social commentator and internationally acclaimed speaker.

His newest book, *Grow A Pair: How To Stop Being a Victim and Take Back Your Life, Your Business and Your Sanity* is a New York Times and Wall Street Journal bestseller. He has also

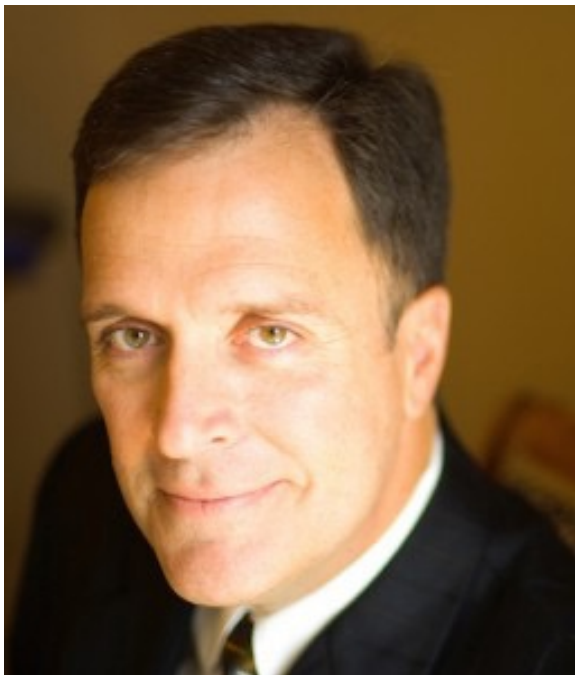
written five additional New York Times/Wall Street Journal bestselling books that have been translated into over 20 languages including *Shut Up, Stop Whining and Get A Life, You're Broke Because You Want To Be, It's Called Work For A Reason, People Are*

Idiots And I Can Prove It, and Your Kids Are Your Own Fault.

Larry's upcoming book, *What's Wrong With Damn Near Everything* will be released in early 2017.

He is a member of the Speaker Hall Of Fame and has spoken to over 400 of the Fortune 500 companies. Larry starred in his own television series on A&E, entitled *Big Spender* as well as two PBS specials and two CNBC specials. He has appeared on *Dr. Phil*, *The Today Show*, *Tool Academy*, *The Big Idea*, *Larry King* and in three national television commercials. He regularly appears on both *Fox News* and *Fox Business* and other national television news shows on the topics of success, business, personal finance, parenting and the wussification of America.

Larry lives in Scottsdale, Arizona with his wife, Rose Mary and his bulldogs Gus and Leon. Find out more at www.LarryWinget.com



Mark Sanborn

Mark is the president of Sanborn & Associates, Inc., an idea lab for leadership development.

In addition to his experience leading at a local and national level, he has written or co-authored 8 books and is the author of more than two dozen videos and audio training programs on leadership,

change, teamwork and customer service. Known for his work in developing leaders and showing organizations how to turn ordinary into extraordinary, he has presented over 2600 speeches and seminars in every state and a fourteen countries. GlobalGurus.org lists Mark as one of the top 10 leadership experts in the world.

Mark is a member of the prestigious Speakers Roundtable, 20 of the top speakers in the world today. Mark holds the Certified Speaking Professional (CSP) from the National Speakers Association and is a member of the Speaker Hall of Fame (CPAE).

Mark's book, *The Fred Factor: How Passion in Your Work and Life Can Turn the Ordinary Into the Extraordinary* is an international bestseller and was on the New York Times, Business Week and Wall Street Journal bestseller lists. His recent books include *You Don't Need a Title to be a Leader: How Anyone, Anywhere Can Make a Positive Difference*, *The Encore Effect: How to Achieve Remarkable Performance in Anything You Do*, *Up, Down or Sideways: How to Succeed When Times are Good, Bad or In Between*. And his latest book *Fred 2.0: New Ideas on How to Keep Delivering Extraordinary Results*.

Mark is a past president of the National Speakers Association and winner of The Cavett, the highest honor bestowed by that organization. He was awarded The Ambassador of Free Enterprise Award by Sales & Marketing Executives International.

He lives in Highlands Ranch, CO with his wife Darla and sons Hunter and Jackson. For more information about Mark and the services he provides, visit www.marksanborn.com



Joe Calloway

Joe Calloway helps great companies and top performers with ideas and strategies to create breakthrough success. He gets organizations focused on what is truly important, inspires new thinking about challenges and opportunities, and motivates people to immediate action.

Joe is the Executive In Residence at Belmont University's Center For Entrepreneurship. He is a business author, consultant and speaker whose client list reads like an international Who's Who in business, ranging from Coca Cola and Verizon to Cadillac and American Express. Joe also works with small to mid-sized business groups including franchisees, medical practices, law firms, and a range of professional services groups.

Joe is the author of [*Be the Best at What Matters Most*](#) and five other ground-breaking business books including *Becoming A Category of One: How Extraordinary Companies Transcend Commodity And Defy Comparison*, which received rave reviews from The New York Times, Retailing Today, Publishers Weekly and many others. His newest book is *Keep It Simple - Unclutter Your Mind To Uncomplicate Your Life.*

Joe is an investor in and advisor to successful startup companies including serving as Gilson Boards and EVAMore.co. Joe is also a partner in real estate developments throughout the mid-south.

Joe has presented at business conferences in countries around the world including Italy, Sweden, South Africa, England, Swaziland, Canada, Mexico and throughout the Caribbean.

Joe is a popular speaker for business meetings and events, and although he has been inducted into the Speakers Hall of Fame, he doesn't do traditional "speeches." Instead, Joe actively engages people in highly interactive keynotes and workshops that challenge assumptions and create new ways of thinking.

Joe lives in Nashville with his wife Annette, and their daughters Jessica and Cate. For more information, go to www.JoeCalloway.com



Randy Pennington

Randy Pennington helps leaders achieve positive results in a world of accelerating change and disruption. He is a twenty-five year business performance veteran, award-winning author, Hall of Fame speaker, and consultant. Randy's clients include many of this country's best-known companies, universities, and government agencies at the local, state, and national levels. He is also a 20-time teaching excellence award winner in the Cox Business Leadership Center at Southern Methodist University.

Randy is the author of three books: *Results Rule!*, which received the

2007 Best Books Award from USA Book News, *On My Honor, I Will*, which Ross Perot described as having “cracked the code of great leadership;” and *Make Change Work*, which received the 2013 Best Books Award for general business from USA Book News.

Randy’s background is a unique blend of line, staff, and consulting experiences ranging from hourly employee to senior management. He holds a Bachelors and Masters Degree in Psychology and completed Postgraduate work in Organization Administration and Management. He is a past Chairman of the Board for the American Heart Association, Texas Affiliate, a founding member of the Texas Council on Cardiovascular Disease and Stroke, and past Chairman for the NSA Foundation. Find out more at www.penningtongroup.com



Scott McKain

Scott McKain is an internationally known authority who helps organizations create distinction in every phase of business and teaches the “Ultimate Customer Experience.”

Scott McKain’s keynote presentations benefit from three decades of experience.

Scott has an innate talent for articulating successful ideas. He has spoken before and consulted for the world’s most influential corporations.

Scott McKain creates captivating presentations and bestselling books which clearly reveal how to create more compelling connections between you and your customers and how to stand out and move up, regardless of the economic climate in your industry.

Scott has presented his business strategies on platforms in all fifty states and seventeen countries...from Singapore to Sweden; from Mexico to Morocco...from the White House with the President in attendance; to conferences in Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

He has been honored with induction into the "Sales and Marketing Hall of Fame" and the "**Professional Speakers Hall of Fame.**"

Scott is the founder of a consulting and training company that explores the role of ultimate customer experiences in creating enhanced client retention and revenue, and is the author of five highly regarded books, all teaching how to expand profits, increase sales, and engage customers. For more information, go to www.ScottMcKain.com

Introduction

The best businesses combine high regard and respect for colleagues with a high commitment to results. That's what The Five Friends is about.

All of us in The Five Friends have been long time friends. We've all known each other for 20 plus years. We share similar interests, professions and hobbies. Importantly, we share a deep respect for each other's work even though we each bring very different styles and skills to the table.

A few years ago our shared love of bourbon found us on a short getaway following the Bourbon Trail in Kentucky, and at some point we decided that it would be fun to collaborate on a biweekly blog. We'd each have 200 words to comment on a topic the group chose.

The perspectives of five different speakers, authors, consultants and coaches would be diverse, and maybe sometimes opposing, but for us enjoyable and for our clients, we hoped, instructive.

The written word soon turned into the spoken word when we decided to video blog. We learned from each other, challenged each other's thinking, shared comments from our respective readers and brainstormed how we might continue to collaborate for more fun and profit, both for us and our clients.

The popularity of The Five Friends collaboration resulted in the launching The Five Friends Business Summit, an annual event and opportunity for ongoing training with the five of us. For more information on that event, go to FiveFriendsBusinessSummit.com.

We enjoy both the collegiality and collaboration so much, and

believe current and future clients can benefit from going deeper with the ideas we've developed individually and collectively.

This ebook is a compilation of some of our best writing and thinking. We hope you'll enjoy it, but more importantly, hope you'll benefit from applying the lessons you learn.

The Five Friends on Business

New Trends In Leadership

From Scott McKain:

My buddy, former Vietnam POW Charlie Plumb, called me last week. "Since you're in town, why don't you come over for dinner? My friend Dick, you and I can grab something." Sounded like a plan!

Imagine my surprise to arrive at Charlie's house to discover his friend is Dick Rutan – the aviation legend who flew around the world, non-stop, without refueling. His plane hangs in the Smithsonian. "Did you enjoy the feat while it was happening?" I asked. "I was afraid every moment – I honestly thought I was going to die," he responded.

"If you were convinced you were going to be killed...why did you forge ahead?"

He replied, "As a leader, for me to have to face those who followed and say, 'I quit,' was an option worse than death. I couldn't stand to think for the rest of my life I would look in the mirror and shave the face of a leader who quit on his team." Unfortunately, a trend I see is "leader as celebrity."

Many see the "rock star" corporate leader and desire that fame...but won't consider the commitment associated with it.

Real leaders understand their enormous responsibility to their followers – just like Dick Rutan.

From Randy Pennington:

Leadership hasn't changed. It is and has always been about influencing people to do something because they want to do it. Sorry. "Cutting edge" ideas like communicating the why; building trust; engagement, and building culture have existed forever. King Solomon taught the importance of focus and understanding the why: "Where there is no vision, the people perish."

Napoleon gave advice on building engagement: "A leader is a dealer in hope."

The idea of treating people with respect isn't new. Dwight Eisenhower said, "You do not lead by hitting people over the head—that's assault, not leadership."

The ancient Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu taught that the best leaders walk beside those they serve. And, the early legends of American business—such as Harley Procter of Procter & Gamble, Thomas Watson of IBM, and James Cash Penney of JCPenney—believed that success ultimately depends on a strong culture.

Three things are changing: follower expectations for involvement and connection; the absence of a common set of values; and the complexities of operating in a 24-7, global marketplace. Leaders must be more intentional and creative than ever about fulfilling their responsibility. The "how" evolves, but the job of leadership never changes.

From Larry Winget:

I am a political junkie. I watch everything about the declared and still-undeclared candidates. As I watch the responses to the overly-abundant crop of Presidential wannabes, it's been interesting to see what resonates with people. Trump, Christie, Jeb, Walker, Perry, Rubio, Hillary and Bernie are candidates that speak to what we are looking for or looking to avoid in our leaders.

Boldness, straight-talk, same ol' same ol', unafraid, old school values, fresh new ideas, and trustworthiness are words being used to describe these candidates. I believe the new trends in leadership are going to be based on this list of descriptions. Too bad that many of these words have gotten to the point of being called "new" and might create a leadership trend (which speaks volumes to how low we have sunk.)

All too often our leaders have none of these qualities or only a few. Too bad we can't play Mr. Potato Head and create the perfect leader. Instead, we can only try to emulate these qualities in our own lives.

Followers/employees/voters/constituents want a trustworthy, straight-talking, bold, unafraid leader with old-school values and fresh ideas. We want this from both our political and our business leaders.

From Joe Calloway:

I saw continuing evidence of a trend in leadership this week with one of my clients. Joseph Choi is a new franchisee for Shelf Genie. As he built his business his strategy was to focus on one thing: culture. Joseph believed that if you build the right culture, that everything else will fall into place.

Shelf Genie executives say that Joseph's business is off to a record start and they credit his success to the incredible culture he has built. From large companies like Tractor Supply Company to smaller businesses like my buddy Marty Grunder's landscaping company, the evidence is clear. If leaders create the right culture by design and with intention, success is sure. Without the right culture, it's almost impossible to succeed.

What used to be considered the "soft stuff" is now being correctly recognized by effective business leaders as the "main stuff."

"Engaging the hearts, minds, and hands of talent is the most sustainable source of competitive advantage." – Greg Harris – Quantum Workplace

"No company, small or large, can win over the long run without energized employees who believe in the mission." – Jack Welch

"To make customers happy, we have to make sure our employees are happy first." – Zappos

From Mark Sanborn:

"I can now say without hyperbole that leadership is dead." Warren Bennis said that...in 1999. He then went on to write more books and articles about leadership.

Leadership is not dead, but followership might be. The biggest change I see in leadership is how those we lead view themselves. Increasingly many view the concept of a single leader skeptically. They know someone may be charged with leading—a department, project, process or organization—but they know things of complexity and magnitude take lots of leadership from many involved to achieve

success.

So leaders shouldn't think of those they lead as "followers" because those they lead don't think or act that way. Especially among younger employees, "follower" seems too subservient, just as nobody in customer service wants to be thought of as a "servant." They consider themselves "contributors," "team members" and "colleagues."

Words matter and in this case reveal the leader's orientation. As a formal leader, I prefer to lead a team of contributors where everyone knows their role and when it is appropriate for him or her to lead. Leaders still need to lead, but the followers of old now need to do more than follow.

What Are The Biggest Challenges Facing Businesses In The Next Five Years?

From Mark Sanborn:

The biggest challenge businesses will face in the next five years is meeting increasing customer expectations.

There is a current dilemma that will only get worse: the more you do for customers, the more they expect.

Excellent service providers scramble to meet the expectations of customers who have become accustomed to great service. Aggressive competitors continue to bump up their offerings in an attempt to gain marketshare. This has culminated in a perpetual desire by customers for more, better, different and/or improved. What used to be good enough no longer is.

The great art and science of business is to improve product and/or service offerings without giving up margins or increasing prices beyond what customers are willing to pay. It really is about adding value without spending too much to do it.

Any business that can't do this will be relegated to competing at the low end of the market on price alone, and that is a difficult place to be.

Rally your team, from engineering to manufacturing to sales and support to regularly brainstorm how you can profitably grow your value proposition. Customers will increasingly demand it.

From Larry Winget:

An entitled, unskilled workforce. Too many children are over-protected, sheltered from disappointment, are not allowed to experience failure and believe they are owed a living. In addition, school systems give participation trophies and don't allow keeping score because losing might hurt the child's feelings and damage their fragile egos. Just as alarming is the new Princeton study that says American millennials are the least skilled in the world. They ranked last in literacy and basic math skills, can't follow directions and can't use technology well enough to use it on a job. A Bentley University study found that 60% of millennials are not considering a career in business and 48% say they have not been encouraged to do so. Yet, in the next 5-10 years millennials will make up the majority of the workforce.

We used to say that education was about the 3 Rs: Reading, wRiting and aRithmetic. Add two more: Responsibility and Respect. Those 5 are our issues and will be our downfall.

Scared yet? You should be. If we are to save American businesses from going outside of our country to hire a qualified workforce, parents must do their jobs and force school systems to do theirs.

From Scott McKain:

The biggest challenge facing business in the next five years is creating distinction in the marketplace so that customers can tell a difference between you and the competition. Many executives and sales professionals complain about "price buyers" – yet, from the customer's perspective, if I can see no difference between you and your competitor, why shouldn't I choose the cheaper alternative?

Don't misunderstand – this isn't about being "different" for

difference's sake. You could slap every customer in the face, and you'd be different. However, you wouldn't be successful.

It's NOT about moving from "good to great." It's about creating distinction in your marketplace. You need to find a way to be a source of wisdom — a beacon of insight — to help your customers make sense of the plethora of information now at their fingertips.

If you can create distinction in your market, you'll find you are not only more successful in your efforts to pursue business – you'll also be attracting new customers, while simultaneously enhancing both repeat business and referrals.

Distinctive organizations – and professionals – are clear about their advantages, creative in their approaches, communicate through a compelling narrative, and have a customer experience focus.

Can you meet that challenge?

From Joe Calloway:

The biggest challenge that businesses will face in the next five years is that the internet has killed hype.

Nobody cares what you say about your business anymore, be it in advertising or online. They care about what your customers say about your business. Recent consumer research shows that 84% of buyers go online to check out a new product or service's consumer ratings and reviews before making a buying decision.

My business lives or dies depending on what people say about me online. I can run a thousand ads telling people how great my latest book is, but if I have a book on Amazon with 3 five star reviews and 53 one star reviews, that book is dead.

In a recent television ad, actor Gary Oldman says ““I could tell you how amazing the all new HTC One is, but I won’t. Because let’s face it, you either already know, or you want to see what others have to say about it. So go ahead, ask the internet.....I’ll wait.....”

What this means is that no one can fake it anymore. You either deliver rock solid value or you’re busted.

From Randy Pennington:

The difference between excellence and irrelevance for your business will come down to this – can you be nimble and adapt to all of the changes and disruptions you will face. Technology change and disruption are a given. But, you will be in for a world of pain if you assume that is the only change or disruption on the horizon.

Your customers will change their expectations. Joe is right – you will not be able to hide behind hype. But wait. There’s more.

Your best competitors will change – both who they are and how they serve your customers. Your employees will change. The Boomers will finally leave and take all of that institutional knowledge with them. The people who replace them will bring a totally different set of expectations.

The regulatory and geo-political environment will change. The culture you need to attract the really smart, driven people necessary to win in this type of world will change.

Faster, better, cheaper, and friendlier are about to become four of your most used words for every part of your business. And, you had better learn to be nimble and change if you want to make it out alive.

What To Do About The Biggest Problems Facing Business

From Randy Pennington:

How do you become more nimble and adapt to change more quickly? Here are five ideas:

- 1) Change the way you think about change. Our mindset – how we think – drives action and feeling. Nimble companies and leaders think of change as an opportunity to be faster, better, cheaper, and friendlier.
- 2) Use the power of a compelling purpose and vision to generate urgency. We readily pursue new options and solutions when presented with an important problem to solve or goal to achieve.
- 3) Use resistance as your friend. Our tendency is to push back when we experience resistance. If you believe that people want to do a good job and succeed, you must learn to accept resistance is a valuable piece of information about a concern or fear that could derail change.
- 4) Make change and innovation part of the culture. An organization's culture is defined by its habits. If you want people to be more nimble and adaptable, you must create the expectation, provide the time, and make it safe to do so.?
- 5) Go first. Leaders set the tone for their organization by action not words. Embrace the opportunities presented by change and people follow you.

From Mark Sanborn:

Increasing expectations are among the biggest challenges any business will face in the next five years. Here are eight things you can do about them.

- 1) Find out what is important to customers: what they require and what they desire. You're not clairvoyant so routinely ask customers for input.
- 2) Explain your value proposition when you must say no. If you can't do something the customer wants, explain why. But see if there is something acceptable you can do instead.
- 3) Educate customers about the value you create for them. If they don't know about it or appreciate, it isn't value.
- 4) Hold quarterly sessions with your team to brainstorm how to add value to the customer's experience.
- 5) Evaluate the entire customer experience. Look for failure points and irritations that can be eliminated and improvements that can be made.
- 6) Pay more attention to your customers than your competition. Know what your competitor is doing, but put your customer at the center of your focus.
- 7) Pleasantly surprise customers whenever you can.
- 8) Treat better customers better. Treat all customers well, but those who spend more should get preferential treatment.

From Scott McKain:

The biggest problem you face – now and in the future – is that there is no distinctive reason for customers to choose you over the competition.

What should you do? Use my Four Cornerstones of Distinction:

1) Clarity. Are you clear about your marketplace advantages (if any, other than price)? Where is your flag planted – the precise spot where you are going to create distinction as a market leader? Is your team on board and in sync?

2) Creativity. What are you doing unique from the approaches that your competition is employing?

3) Communication. Today's audience can go to Google and discover any piece of information they require. Your style of communication must shift from providing information to delivering insight. How can you help customers receive more value and become more productive?

4) Customer Experience Focus. What does it feel like to be your customer? Is it compelling enough that it ensures both repeat and referral business? If not, you have to step it up.

Goldman Sachs recently reported that 30% of Millennials say they'll never buy a car. 50% aren't concerned about buying a house. You can't be average and survive in that challenging future marketplace. You must create distinction.

From Joe Calloway:

The biggest challenge that businesses will face in the next five years is that the internet has killed hype.

That means that on twitter, review sites, Facebook, and throughout social media land, your customers are telling everyone everything about you – the good, the bad, and the ugly.

What you should do is stop worrying about what you tweet and post and start focusing on the quality of your products and services so that your customers will tweet and post your praises.

- 1) Get clarity: what are the 3 specific things that you want your customers to say about you?
- 2) Get focused: what are the 3 things you must do right every time, with every customer, to get them to say those wonderful things.
- 3) Now execute on those 3 things with consistency and excellence. Scott's right – you can't be average and survive. The rules of business are simple and brutal: you have to win on something, whether it's price, quality, service, or experience. But you have to win.

No one cares what you say about your business anymore. They care what your customers say. So you'd better realize that your most powerful marketing is in your performance.

From Larry Winget:

I see the biggest challenge as an entitled, unskilled workforce. To solve this impending crisis, we are going to have to do the following things:

- Parental responsibility: Parents are going to have to teach their children to be self-reliant. They are also going to have to stop being enablers of their children. Parents also need to teach the skills necessary for success: work ethic, communications, respect for authority and of co-workers and customers. Parents are going to have to force more accountability on school systems to teach basic skills. Parents are going to need to guide their children toward an education in marketable skills.
- Educational systems. School systems must make sure that kids can read, write, do basic math and follow directions. They also need to teach computer skills that are useful in the business world. And they are going to have to refuse to pass kids who can't do the necessary work.
- Training. Businesses must be prepared to educate the new workforce since school systems and parents haven't and probably won't do their jobs. Businesses are going to need to budget both time and money and teach the skills they need from their employees.

You're Fired! Common Mistakes That Lose Customers

From Randy Pennington:

We fired the service that had done all of our lawn care, landscaping, tree trimming, and holiday lights for 17 years. There wasn't one single incident that caused us to leave. It was the culmination of a number of little things over an 18 month period.

In the beginning, the owner closely supervised the crews, paid attention to quality, and was excellent in following up and communicating. Then again, his business was new and hungry.

Over the years, the service level and responsiveness diminished. Emails and telephone messages went unanswered for up to a week. The quality of the work became inconsistent, and we could no longer count on him to follow-through on requests without constant prodding.

And yet, we weren't really looking to change. He's a good guy, and we tried to understand when he told us that he had so much business that keeping up was difficult. But we fired this provider for the same reasons that many personal relationships fail – inattention.

We felt ignored and taken for granted. Someone made us feel wanted by asking for our business, and we said, "What have we got to lose?"

From Joe Calloway:

A couple of years ago I fired a company that had become irrelevant

to me, but the ensuing madness and incompetence was almost beyond description. I will never do business with them again. I had a telephone line with AT&T for my office – a land line that I almost never used. Finally I pulled the plug, cancelled the service and that was that. Not.

For six months I dealt with AT&T reps who threatened me with collection agency action for my unpaid bill – on a line I had cancelled months earlier. One rep would say “I’ll take care of it.” The next day I’d get a letter from their legal department saying “You’re delinquent on your bill – we’re suing.” Back and forth, to and fro, one rep more incompetent and uncaring than the next.

I think the two, big, common mistakes that AT&T made were 1) having a system in which one department had no idea what another was doing, and, 2) hiring people who simply didn’t care about the customer.

I guess if I were to boil it down even more, I’d say to AT&T, “Don’t be incompetent. Don’t be mean. Don’t be stupid.”

From Larry Winget:

I set an appointment to buy garage doors. He didn’t show and didn’t call to let me know he was running late. He didn’t answer his phone when I called. When he got there four hours later, I told him I wasn’t doing business with him because he was disrespectful of my time and that if he couldn’t keep his word about an appointment, then I didn’t trust his doors, quote or delivery date.

An air conditioning company left a mess behind after working on my air conditioner. They could have sold me a new one, but after leaving their food wrappers and wire clippings in my yard, I found another company.

A doctor's receptionist told me to "go sit down" when I inquired why it was an hour after my appointment time and I still hadn't been seen. I'm a grown man; you don't get to talk to me like I'm 7 years old when I inquire why you can't keep your word.

My motto: Do what you said you would do, when you said you would do it, the way you said you would do it. If you don't, you're a liar and we won't do business.

From Mark Sanborn:

I fired one of my favorite restaurant chains.

I took my family to our local Pappadeaux Seafood Kitchen to celebrate a birthday. The experience was a parody of what should have happened: slow service, wrong drink orders, wrong food orders and more. It was exasperating.

A young manager, however, saved the day. She comped the entire meal and provided me a \$50 gift certificate to encourage me to return.

I tried to compliment her to corporate. The website feedback form was convoluted but I filled in the required information and praised the assistant manager. The promised "response within 48 hours" never came.

I called corporate to follow up. Whoever I spoke to wasn't very helpful, so I asked for a manager to call me. Instead the local store manager called and left a message. He said he'd be out of town for a few days and would follow up when he returned. He never did.

When I tried to use the \$50 certificate, I found unexpected

restrictions. It was the final straw.

At the time I was writing a Five Friends blog about our favorite restaurants. I dropped Pappadeauxs from the list.

From Scott McKain:

My wife and I were sharing with her oncologist about our just-completed weekend in Napa. The doctor said to us, "Don't spend your time doing frivolous things like Napa. Your life will be ending soon." I was flabbergasted – why would you not want to enjoy the time you had left?

"Sheri's situation is terminal and she will be gone soon." The doctor was talking as if my wife wasn't sitting right there in front of her. Standing up, and looking at the doctor, I said three words to her: "You are fired."

Her jaw dropped. "You can't fire me," she replied, "I'm a doctor."

"Call it whatever you want," I said, "but you will never see us again."

We found another oncologist – a wonderful, compassionate doctor – and Sheri had another three years of full living, enjoying each day. Sometimes when we think about firing, we tend to think of the examples of retailers or service providers that are mentioned by my friends here.

Yet, when professionals at the highest level of social respect fail to exhibit empathy, or place themselves on a pedestal that interferes with the experience of the customer, client, or patient – they, too, deserve to be fired.

Can A Business Be Too Creative?

From Joe Calloway:

You could make the case that the Left Shark going “off script” with his (her?) creative renegade dance steps actually got the whole halftime show an amazing amount of post-performance publicity. It may have taken attention away from Katy Perry, but it certainly sparked a few days of interest and conversation that wouldn’t have happened otherwise, so maybe it ultimately benefited Katy Perry.

If being creative and different serves the purpose of attracting attention to a value producing endeavor – then I vote yes. On Facebook our friend Toni Newman has posted dozens of brilliantly creative ways that organizations market and communicate in order to get their messages above the fray of sameness and mediocrity.

On the other hand, I think that in business people sometimes get so carried away with the idea of being “different” that they lose site of what the ultimate mission of creating value. They simply make noise. Being creative and different for its own sake can be a grand and glorious thing. I thought the Left Shark dancer was a hoot. But, a renegade “creative” violinist in a symphony could destroy the experience for everyone.

So I say be creative, be different. Don’t be stupid.

From Larry Winget:

I don’t even remember the sharks at the 2015 Halftime Show with Katy Perry. Why? I was watching Katy Perry: meaning a couple of things, but in this context it means that some are focused on the star

and not the creative distractions.

In your business, some of your customers just want your product or your service to be the star and all of that creative stuff is nothing but a distraction. Often, businesses sacrifice the product or service trying to be overly creative. Don't.

Along the same lines, this past week at the ACM Awards, Florida Georgia Line's performance was so full of pyrotechnics that it was a distraction. (Probably, covering up what I consider to be a lack of talent.) How many businesses don't have any substance but are covering that fact up with creative distractions? Too many.

On another note, sometimes creativity runs amok and the entire message is lost. Political Correctness, business jargon and marketing-speak are all fancy ways of cluttering up a message. To prove that, I said "marketing-speak."

My lessons here: Creativity is good unless it distracts. Creativity can't cover up a lack of talent forever. Creativity can clutter up your message.

From Mark Sanborn:

"Jump the shark" describes an implausible plot construct (thanks to Fonzie water skiing over a shark in Happy Days). I doubt "dance the shark" will catch on, but the question of when to be different is a good one.

One way to judge is to ask if the difference is valued. We want to grow our value proposition for customers and we can't do that doing what we and others have always done.

Another question: is the difference valued by the team? If the deviation from script makes others look bad and negatively affects

their performance, then it isn't such a good thing. Different has risks in a team performance.

And what if the left Shark had tried something different and it had bombed? Consider the response of, "Wow, that was stupid!" There are few guarantees that what you do differently will be well received, and we mostly hear about the spectacular success, but less about the colossal failures.

In the final analysis, deciding to be different is a judgement call with no assurances. But that call needs to take into consideration everyone who is affected by it, not just what the performer wants to do.

From Randy Pennington:

Being creative and different is rarely a good idea in three situations:

1. There are clear safety guidelines. I don't want nuclear reactor operators to be proactively creative. Likewise, I would rather my surgeon be boring and good rather than creative and different.
2. There are clear legal guidelines. Enron got creative with how it handled accounting, and that didn't work for them.
3. There is no value to be added. There is a fine line between being creative and being weird or distracting. That line is crossed on a regular basis.

There are definite exceptions to all three.

The U.S. Marines – a highly disciplined and regimented organization – live by the motto of *Improvise, Adapt and Overcome*. I hope nuclear reactor operators and my surgeon adopt that same principle

in the face of a crisis. And, don't we all secretly want our CPA to be creative enough to secure a deduction without triggering an audit?

Which leaves the "Left Shark." There are times when weird and distracting morph into remarkable and fun. It was a risk that worked. Not all of them do. To paraphrase an old saying, "Some days you eat the shark, and some days the shark eats you."

From Scott McKain:

There are times you need to just do your job. At the risk of sounding like Clint Eastwood telling kids to "get off my lawn," I wonder if our age of rampant individualism has reached the point where many believe they are entitled to do whatever they want, whenever they want – and without consequences?

Discretion is about understanding when it's appropriate to go off script – and maturity is having the personal discipline to back up that knowledge with action.

I was recently on a program with another speaker – not one of the "Five Friends" – who dramatically exceeded his prescribed time limit. Like "Left Shark," he was enthralled with his performance – joyously reveling in the attention of the audience.

The problem is that he threw the rest of the program out of kilter. Lunch was served cold, because the group was late. Several other presenters had to tighten up their presentations – upon which they had labored extensively – because the "free wheeling" speaker didn't understand the ripple effect of his "creativity."

Innovation is an important element in creating distinction. Yet, your individuality needs to be respectful of the work of others, as well. Sometimes, you just need to do your damn job.

What Is A Leader's Most Important Job?

From Larry Winget:

A leader's most important job: To lead. Duh.

How do you lead? Not from behind, that's for sure. Leaders have to get out in front with their ideas, vision, energy and presence.

As I watch movies and TV shows about the battles of old, I always see the leader, even when the leader was the King himself, sitting atop his horse and charging into battle out in front of his troops. What an inspiration that must have been to see their leader's commitment to his beliefs, his words and to his troops by being willing to risk it all by riding ahead of them into battle. Of course, that also meant that he usually got killed first. There are consequences for being the leader.

The risk is the reason they make the big bucks and why we record their names in the history books.

Few leaders today risk much. They rarely get out in front for fear of the consequences. They want the glory when it goes well but mostly they don't want the blame when it doesn't go well. They don't want the responsibility for the mess because they might lose their job, or not get re-elected.

From Mark Sanborn:

A leader's most important job is focusing the time and expertise of her team on doing the most important work of the organization.

All results and revenue are driven by how people spend their time (effort) and expertise (knowledge and skills). Profit, innovation, efficiency, effectiveness—everything is the byproduct of time and expertise. Invested wisely, the organization achieves great success.

Lacking focus, mediocrity becomes the norm.

A leader isn't just a person who is focused, but one who creates shared focus. There is a great deal of wasted time and expertise in companies where employees are doing low-priority work, or work that shouldn't be done at all. But lacking an effective leader, it is difficult for them to know what they should be doing instead.

Just as a conductor makes sure members of an orchestra are all playing the right music to the best of their ability, so does an effective leader do his job. That is the most important job of the leader.

From Joe Calloway:

What is a leader's most important job? Clarity.

First and foremost, clarity about culture. Everyone must be crystal clear about who we are, what we value, and how we treat people. Clarity about culture means that those who violate the culture must leave. (Your culture, by the way, may very well invite new ideas, criticism, and disagreements.)

Then, clarity about what is most important. Here I agree with Mark Sanborn wholeheartedly. An effective leader makes clear exactly where we are going and what we have to do to get there. Everyone knows what the priorities are and is focused on the execution of those priorities.

We've all had the experience of working for a leader who was unclear about expectations, direction, or values. It's the worst. A leader with no clear direction can destroy an organization.

To achieve clarity, a leader must have the ability to make the complicated simple. Steve Jobs was a master of this. He once said "if you can make things simple, you can move mountains."

Amen. Give us leaders who can enable us to move mountains. Give us clarity.

From Scott McKain:

The leader's most important job: make great decisions for the long-term benefit of the group.

It's important to recognize that the leader has to view both the group that he or she has been designated to lead, and the challenges and opportunities in front of them, from a strategic, "30,000 feet" level.

This means sometimes building consensus before the decision is made is the right choice – other situations call for developing support for a judgment the leader has already determined.

Note, as well, I suggest it's for the LONG TERM benefit of the group – which is precisely why so many executives aren't true leaders. They're managing for this quarter's numbers, not leading their companies to create distinction.

When the leader views the future from that "30,000 feet" level, it's like looking out the window of an airplane – you can see much farther down the road with that perspective than someone driving to the same destination. It's referred to as the leader having "vision."

Until women and men in positions of authority are willing to have a visionary perspective, and start making more great decisions with the long-term benefit of their group or followers in mind, we won't see an expansion of great leadership.

From Randy Pennington:

Leadership is influence and the scorecard is results. The leader's most important – you could say only – job is to influence others to deliver positive results. Results rule! Everything else is a discussion of the best ways to do so.

Ross Perot distinguished the difference between managing and leading very clearly: "You manage data and things. You lead people." And when it comes to leading people, there is nothing more important than creating a culture that consistently delivers positive results for the customer and the company.

Your culture is defined by your habits. My work with leaders and organizations has taught me that the best opportunities for consistent results occur when the culture reinforces these six choices at every level every day:

1. Value candor and honesty
2. Pursue the best over the easiest
3. Focus the energy to make the main thing the main thing
4. Leverage the power of partnerships with customers and staff
5. Continually learn, grow, and adapt
6. Show the courage of accountability

Your organization is perfectly designed to deliver the results you are delivering today. It is your job to build and sustain a culture that can deliver results tomorrow and beyond.

Why Is Customer Service So Bad At Most Places?

From Scott McKain:

Customer service is bad at most places, because evidently that is what CEO's and managers want. What other reason could there be for them to accept such miserable performance?

Most care more about selling than serving. We know that when sales decline, companies will buy ads, offer new customers better deals than existing ones, deliver training, hold major events, and take any number of extraordinary measures to pump up revenue. They are passionate and precise about customer acquisition — but reserved and reticent about customer retention.

Here's evidence: most companies have annual sales rallies – how many have one every year for customer service?

Educated and cared-for employees should be prepared to deliver “Ultimate Customer Experiences ®” to everyone spending money with you. In turn, these customers replicate their purchases, and refer you to their friends and colleagues. Your business grows.

Lather. Rinse. Repeat.

If everybody – from front line employees, to entrepreneurs, to major corporate executives – would create experiences so compelling to customers that their loyalty becomes assured, organizations would experience enhanced levels of both acquisition and retention.

Yet, if it's not the priority of the leadership or owners – why should

the folks on the front line get excited about it?

From Larry Winget:

Customer service is bad because we allow it to be bad.

What do you do when you get bad service? Tell the truth. Most do nothing. Most people simply don't have the cojones to speak up when they get bad service. They don't tell the person delivering it. They don't ask for a manager. They don't leave an online review. At most, they might – maybe – possibly (though probably not) stop shopping with that business.

If you aren't willing to speak up, then you are an accessory to the crime. You have allowed a crime to happen and stayed silent about it. Shame on you. You owe it to yourself, the next shopper and to the company to speak up in an effort to make things better in the future. You can't ignore bad service and expect it to get better. Behavior that is ignored will be repeated. It's a law. Write it down.

Next time you get bad service, speak up. Remember: it's your money you are defending – money you worked hard for. Tell the company and others. Use the internet and social media. That's how customer service will improve for all of us.

From Mark Sanborn:

Larry makes a great point about the customer's culpability in enabling bad customer service. Here is the employer's role:

1. Customer service isn't taught. No matter how motivated an employee is, they can't perform a job without the right skills. (And don't confuse "smile and grin" training with true customer service training. There is more to great service than simply "being nice.")

2. It isn't rewarded. Most organizations pay no more attention to those who provide great service than those who don't. As the old adage goes, what gets rewarded gets done. The corollary is what doesn't get rewarded usually stops being done.

3. It isn't required. If delivering extraordinary service isn't part of the job description, don't be surprised when you don't get it and get push back when you "request" it. Great service shouldn't be an option.

Require your team to provide great service. Just make sure you teach them how and reward them appropriately when they do.

From Joe Calloway:

At 90+% of the places I do business, customer service runs from good to absolutely great. I travel a lot, and renting a car used to be torture. Now I hit about 4 clicks on the rental website, get to the airport, walk into the lot and pick any car I want (I tend to rent from National), and drive away. I recently returned some hiking boots I'd worn for a while to REI (I wasn't happy with the fit.) They smiled, got a salesperson to help me with another pair, and I was on my way. The kids working at Chik-fil-A are friendly, efficient, and the chicken is good. Amazon Prime is one button to buy and ships in two days. Zappos service is legend. My car dealer loans me a new car to use when I get mine serviced.

"But wait! You aren't going to the places with bad service!"

Exactly. Read Larry Winget's post on this. If I get bad service, I fire them. I don't go back and I tell them why and they don't get my money any more. Lousy service happens when customers let them get away with it.

From Randy Pennington:

My friends are correct – service is bad because leaders want and/or allow it.

From my experience, this leadership failure is rooted in one critical idea: Companies with bad service view it as a cost to be managed rather than an investment that creates a competitive advantage.

This view will never be acknowledged. In fact, most companies say that they strive for service excellence. Words are not action, however.

Focus on these three areas if you want to make service your competitive advantage:

1. People: Who do you hire? How are they trained, compensated, and rewarded? Do your front-line leaders develop them and provide a great environment in which to work? Who is promoted, and who is fired?

2. Process: Is every process clearly defined, documented, and communicated? Are your processes designed to deliver the best possible result for the customer or the least expensive result for the company? Do you continually evaluate and update processes to stay current and relevant?

3. Tools: Do your people have the resources and information they need to succeed? Are they empowered to actually use the tools at their disposal?

Stop managing service as a cost. Start leading it as an investment.

Employers Need To Remember That:

From Larry Winget:

1. If you have lousy employees, it's because you are a lousy employer. Your employees will be no better than you are. Fix yourself first. Your employees only reflect back to you who you really are as an employer and company.
2. Your job is to make your company the best place for a customer to do business with. That means you must hire the best people, give them the best training, be the best example for them to emulate and drive the concept of "value" home with every person who works there.
3. Stand up for what is right. Don't even think about whether it is the easiest thing, the cheapest thing or the fastest thing. The right thing is sometimes the hardest, the most expensive and the slowest thing you can do. Do the right thing regardless.
4. Your employees can't read your mind. Don't expect them to know what you want until you tell them and teach them.
5. Hire slow. Fire fast. Most employers have this one backwards.
6. If you put up with it, you are endorsing it. Do you endorse rudeness, lousy service, being late, stealing, being lazy or disrespectful? No? Then why do you put up with it?

From Joe Calloway:

1. Unhappy employees deliver bad service and do poor quality work. Any employer who says "I don't care if my employees are happy" is

an idiot that understands neither people nor business.

2. Your employees watch every move you make. That's how they know what the "rules" are. What you do and how you behave towards people carries more weight and influence than any pronouncements that you make or emails that you send.

3. If your front line employees are doing things that damage your brand or business (think Comcast bills that call customers "ass***e" or "b*tch"), that's your responsibility. That's a failure of leadership, pure and simple.

4. If you have employees that routinely violate the stated values, i.e. "We treat others with respect," then your values are a lie as long as those employees continue to work there.

5. Your decisions as leader of the organization are worthless unless you get buy-in from your employees.

6. If you think that you will get the best from people only "because I pay them," then you should move to a place where that makes more sense; like the 19th Century.

From Randy Pennington:

1. A great culture with a mediocre strategy outperforms a great strategy with a mediocre culture.

2. Your business will only grow as fast and as large as the quality of your employees and their commitment to excellence.

3. The right employees, when hired, developed, and retained, are an investment not an expense.

4. When you treat people as responsible adults, you earn the right to expect them to act that way.

5. You can mandate compliance. Commitment is volunteered.

6. No one ever received too much legitimate recognition for their excellent effort and results.

7. Your good employees will love you if you get rid of the Bozos who suck the life out of your workplace.

8. If you don't care about being the best, don't expect your employees to either.

9. How you act when times are tough is the real test of how much you believe in your values.

10. The managers in the middle who have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo are probably your biggest obstacle to change.

And the bonus: Past success proves you were right once. If you can't change, you will die.

From Mark Sanborn:

Employers need to remember that you rent behavior but you earn loyalty.

An employment agreement done right is about identifying what behaviors are required and what compensation will be made for those behaviors. That means it is critically important to be clear on the results you want and the behaviors needed to attain them. In an imperfect world there are often obstacles that block even the

best behaviors from getting results. They include things like bureaucracy, flawed processes and bad management. Leadership is about removing obstacles and creating favorable conditions for employees to succeed.

You can't, however, buy or rent loyalty. Loyalty is earned by how leaders treat employees. It is not just what a manager does for an employee, but how he or she does it.

If an employee doesn't feel he is treated fairly, two things usually happen. First, he is less loyal and likely looking for better opportunities elsewhere. Second, lacking the loyalty he feels deserves, the employee will ask for more compensation to make up for it. He isn't asking for more money to become loyal; he is asking for more money to reimburse him because the employer isn't loyal.

No surprise here, but the best way to get loyalty is to give it. It is something money can't rent or buy.

From Scott McKain:

Employers must remember their reason for existing: "The purpose of any business is to profitably create experiences so compelling to the customer that loyalty becomes assured."

You must figure out how to engineer an experience for prospects that is so valuable they become customers – and so compelling for customers that they keep coming back for more...while referring you to their friends and colleagues.

This goal isn't achieved without an engaged workforce, inspired by a dynamic culture. Employers need to view their employees as nothing more or less than the "internal customers" of the organization.

You're probably aware that the focus of my work centers upon how an organization, leader, or individual creates distinction in their respective marketplaces. What I frequently find is that companies focus internally — and individuals focus on themselves.

Instead, a critical difference is that the distinctive organization or professional has an outward-facing approach that attracts customers through engaging and insightful connections.

Your product doesn't make those connections – your people do. So, ask yourself the critical question: Why would a talented professional choose to work for us, **RATHER THAN THE COMPETITION?**

Hint: It's not compensation. It's about the compelling experience you create for your internal customers.

Employees Need To Remember That:

From Scott McKain:

Employees should remember EVERYONE is replaceable – those who aren't distinctive get replaced first.

Steve Jobs died in 2011. Apple just reported their most profitable quarter ever. Tim Cook is good, too. McDonald's just replaced their CEO – made zero difference to the taste of a Big Mac. Think you're more important to your company than they were to theirs?

Unless you find a way to change, grow, stand out, and create distinction – why shouldn't your company replace you with someone who has more desire and fewer demands?

The purpose of any business is to create customers – not employees. Don't misunderstand; I believe companies perform optimally when they build a culture that cares about their employee's satisfaction, happiness, and encourages the professional growth and development of everyone on the team.

However, I recently heard this interesting remark: "We're wrong about Darwin. He wasn't about 'survival of the fittest' as much as that the surviving species are the ones most willing to adapt and change."

Unless you are willing to invest personal effort to change, grow, and separate yourself from the pack – why should any company that desires to create distinction allow you to survive as their employee?

From Larry Winget:

You are paid to work: not make personal calls, do your social media or any other personal activity. Every employee should stop and ask themselves, "Is this what I was hired to do and am being paid to do?" If not, you are stealing from your employer and should stop.

You are an expense. If the cost to have you employed exceeds your value, then there is no reason for the company to employ you. Always be adding to your value.

No one likes a whiner, complainer, gossip or trouble-maker, but everyone loves a person who will do what it takes to get it done, is willing to be of service to anyone and can be counted on.

Businesses don't exist to make employees happy. They want their employees to be happy, but that is not the reason they are in business. They are in business to be profitable. They do that by having products and services their customers want and by serving those customers well. It's a simple equation. Employees need to understand it and contribute to the profitability of the company in order to have job security.

Yep, I'm a hardass.

From Joe Calloway:

Employees should remember that they should never have to work for a jerk who is disrespectful or takes advantage of them or anyone else. If you are getting less than you deserve, you should remember Johnny Paycheck, who took his job and...quit.

The minute you settle for less than you deserve, you start a pattern that's hard to change. The question is, what do you deserve? Not as

a human being, but as an employee in a competitive job market.

Employees should endeavor to place themselves in a position where they command the maximum they can possibly get.

There's one way to do that: be valuable. Produce results so impressive and compelling that you can't be denied. Be in a position to replace the job you have with a better one because any employer would be crazy not to want you – to bid up the price for you.

Be so valuable that when you say "I quit," your employer will say "You can't. We won't let you. What will it take for you to stay?" Be that valuable, and you can call the shots.

From Randy Pennington:

Do you feel richer than you did a year ago? I didn't think so.

Salaries increased an average of 3 percent across all jobs in 2014. Average wages for hourly employees actually dropped 1.7 percent last year. Health care premiums were up an average of 4.7 percent.

Here is what you need to know about getting paid what you want:

- Your economic value is based on the importance, complexity, and urgency of the problems you can solve. Your salary is based on the cost of acquiring your job at a fully competent level from the marketplace. You will receive some bonus points if you are a superior performer, but not much and not a promotion based on longevity.
- It is your responsibility to make yourself more valuable. Your employer—at least the good ones—will help you develop in

the job you hold. The exceptional ones will offer career advancement opportunities. But for the majority of employers, it is up to you.

There is a reason doctors earn more than nurses. There is a reason that the go-to person in your company earns more than you.

Increase your skills. Become that go-to person. That is how you get ahead.

From Mark Sanborn:

You give your work dignity. Politicians remind us that work gives people dignity, and it does.

But how you do your job determines the importance and impact of it. B.C. Forbes said, "There is more credit and satisfaction in being a first-rate truck driver than a tenth-rate executive."

Martin Luther King said it well, "If a man is called to be a street sweeper, he should sweep streets even as a Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music or Shakespeare wrote poetry. He should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will pause to say, 'Here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.'"

As an employee you might feel you have a redundant job that is dead end. Continue to look for better work, but in the meantime, why not accept the challenge of doing your job as well as you can and perhaps even recreating it to be more fulfilling?

Having a job helps give you dignity. How you do it gives dignity to the job.

How Selling Has Changed

From Mark Sanborn:

First, it used to be enough to promise value to make the sale. If a client believed you could deliver, they gave you a chance. Today, you need to prove value to make the sale. Demonstrate what you can do to help the client be more successful. Don't tell prospects how good the candy tastes. Let them taste the candy knowing they'll want to buy more once they do.

Second, it has become cliché that "customers don't want to be sold, they want to buy." That's changed. Today customers want to be sold—to have a professional get to know them, understand their needs and suggest the best possible product or service to meet them.

Customers are better informed, but that still don't want to do the work of the sales professional. Customers want to be sold so they can make a good buying decision. (What they don't want is to be pressured or manipulated.)

Finally, a sale doesn't create a customer. A sale creates a transaction. How the sale is made and what happens after creates a customer, or sends a potential long-term customer packing. A sales pro aims for an ongoing relationship, not a single transaction.

From Scott McKain:

The Agricultural Age didn't end because we ran out of farms. The Industrial Age didn't conclude because we ran out of factories. Instead, the products of those farms and factories became so plentiful that customers of their goods could afford more in the way of services.

Now, in my opinion, the Information Age is dead. It's not because we're out of information – it's that we are awash in it.

Therefore, the fundamental nature of selling has changed.

My client, BMW, tells me that just six years ago, the average customer made about six visits to car dealerships to make a purchase decision. Today, that number has dropped to 1.3!

Why? Customers don't need the salesperson to serve as their source of information. The Internet means we enter a dealership armed with almost as much enlightenment about the car as the person trying to sell us!

The distinctive sales professional of today – and the future – views her job as one of providing wisdom, rather than merely regurgitating product information.

Your success in sales will depend more upon your ability to provide superior insights about how you are a better solution – and less upon dumping data on prospects you're attempting to persuade.

From Larry Winget:

The fundamentals of selling really haven't changed. Buying has changed, but not selling.

Selling is, always has been and always will be about having a product the customer perceives to be a solution to a problem they have. If your product doesn't solve a customer's problem, you have nothing to sell. Some people think they have a great product but if the customer doesn't see it as a solution, you've got nothing. And the bigger the problem you solve, the more you can charge for it. A 99 cent hamburger solves a 99 cent problem. A \$250,000 heart surgery

obviously solves a bigger problem and costs more.

Past that concept, you have to make the customer aware that you have a solution and you have to ask the customer to buy it. The way you do both of those HAS changed dramatically.

My focus has always been on the basics: solving a problem, making people aware I have a solution to their problem and asking them to buy it. All while working on my product to make sure the value of the problem I solve increases so I can charge more for it.

From Joe Calloway:

Selling used to be about knowing your product or service inside out so that you could make a great pitch to your prospect. For me, a key to my selling success has been having deep knowledge about the customer and the customer's business. When a new prospect says to me, "Why should I do business with you?" my answer is, "I don't know that you should. Let's find out."

Then the process begins. It's not a process of convincing them to buy. It's a process of me gaining a deep understanding of what they're wanting to accomplish or, as Larry points out, what problem they're trying to solve.

One moment I'll always remember was sitting in the office of a CEO who said to me, "The reason we do business with you is that you get us. You understand where we're trying to take this company and you help us to that."

Let me know more about the customer and understand their business better than my competition does and I'll win almost every time.

Selling yesterday: I'm good at what I do.

Selling today: I'm good at understanding what you do and here's how I can help you.

From Randy Pennington:

Does this sound familiar?

"Competition is stronger. No longer will sales gimmickry work in the marketplace. Buyers are getting smarter, more sophisticated, more demanding. They won't put up with all of this old manipulative stuff anymore... Buyer tastes and levels of awareness are constantly being upgraded. And the whole world is competing for consumers' dollars."

This message echoes many of the themes my colleagues have so eloquently shared. Ron Willingham wrote them in a book titled Integrity Selling in 1987.

Everything has changed, and nothing has changed.

Today's customer expectations are simply the continued evolution of a change that began decades ago. But, the principles that sustain the best sales professionals remain the same.

Know what you are doing and why. Listen. Solve the customer's problem not your own. Constantly reassess your strategy.

Continuously upgrade your tactics and tools to remain relevant. Serve the customer where they are.

Customer preferences, values, and demographics will always change. Technology and tools will continue to become more powerful giving

you and your customer more information. How you build and sustain your army of satisfied customers will always change. The need to do so will remain.

Employees: Fire Them Or Fix Them?

From Joe Calloway:

In my 30+ years of working with leaders of organizations of every description imaginable, I've discovered a couple of truths about leadership and employees.

One is that when a leader reaches the point where an employee needs to be fired, that leader will tell you that he or she knew it needed to be done a long time ago and wish the hard decision had been made much earlier. This is as much for the employee's sake as for the organization's. Keeping people in a place where they don't fit isn't doing them any favors.

Another truth I've learned is that a great way to evaluate your present employees is to apply this question to each one: If this person didn't already work here, would I hire him or her today? If the answer is no, well, there's clue for you that something's out of whack and maybe a conversation is in order.

"Fixing" an employee can sometimes mean "fixing" the leader or manager. If you are being unclear about expectations, aren't giving adequate support or resources, or have created a toxic culture – fix yourself and see what a difference it can make in your employees.

From Mark Sanborn:

You can't fix an employee, but you might be able to fix his or her performance.

Common sense and a good policy manual will clarify the majority of situations when an employee should be fired, but there are times

when you need to use judgment and intuition.

If an employee has been insubordinate deliberately and frequently, there's little sense in trying to change or fix their performance.

Ask yourself these questions to determine if fixing is the best course of action:

1. Does the employee show remorse for poor performance?
2. Is he or she receptive to the fix—suggestions and coaching—you feel necessary to change?
3. Are they quick to implement the fix?
4. Are you seeing positive improvement and results that prove progress?

Firing is likely warranted when:

1. The employee shows lack of concern for mistakes or poor performance.
2. They resist or resent feedback and suggestions
3. They pay lip service to changing but don't demonstrate it.
4. The conversation around the problem occurs more than once (or worse, repeatedly).

Show the courage Don't fire out of anger, and think carefully about the consequences to your organization and the employee. At the same time realize that fixing isn't always an option. e of accountability

From Scott McKain:

You can coach people. You can help people. You might inspire or motivate people. You can't fix people.

A desire to “fix” someone else is frequently rooted not in their problems, but in yours. It springs from the compulsion to make others conform to your standards, because you’re uncomfortable with things not being done the way that you choose.

As you might imagine, in the profession of business speaking and writing that the Five Friends share, we’re around others in our industry who have an almost genetic need to tell people how to do their jobs and live their lives. They perceive that “fixing” people will inspire their audience to admire and appreciate the one who gives advice. For some, it’s practically to the point of a sickness – a consistently sad, desperate attempt to receive approval from others. Instead, we end up resenting their efforts. Make sure your desire to “fix” an employee isn’t a “you” problem, instead of them.

In the real world, no one wants to be fixed. They want to be coached, helped, inspired, and motivated.

If you can’t lead them to that point – or if they choose not to participate – then, it’s time to fire them.

From Randy Pennington:

The only time you immediately fire an employee is when they have done something so severe that they haven’t earned the right to a second chance. The HR people call these conduct infractions. They include things such as theft, serious safety violations, gross misconduct, or abusive language.

The rest of the time you help employees fix themselves. That means bringing the problem to their attention; providing clear expectations; giving them training and support if appropriate; and then holding them accountable for meeting your expectations. These situations include chronic attendance and job performance problems. But, they

also include times when the person just doesn't fit with your culture.

The most difficult person you will ever fire is the hard worker who can no longer do the job. You should do everything in your power to help this person – maybe even carrying them for a while. But if all else fails, you have to take action.

Firing someone should not be taken lightly or done illegally. The replacement costs range from 2 to 12 months of salary depending on the sophistication level of the job. But, firing someone can be the best solution for removing toxic waste that prevents excellent performance.

From Larry Winget:

By the time most managers get around to firing someone, it's too late. You have to "fix" employees when the infraction happens the first time. You don't let it slide until it grows into something unfixable, which is typically what happens. Bad habits are hard to break which means nothing should be tolerated/ignored long enough for it to become a bad habit. But that requires that the manager have true dedication to the company, the culture, the customer, the employee and the other workers. It requires involvement and awareness and a willingness to get their hands dirty early and often.

Most employee issues can be fixed when detected and addressed early. And too many potentially great employees are wasted when the issue isn't addressed and corrected early.

If this sounds a lot like shutting the barn door after the horse is out, it is. If management hasn't done their job with good training, clear expectations and constant reinforcement, then the options are few and the employee usually must be fired.

If the employee is a long-time employee and messes up, spend the time to figure out what the issue is. It's amazing what can be accomplished with old-fashioned two-way conversation.

The Battle For Relevance

From Scott McKain:

Death concerns me; irrelevance terrifies me to the core. On my 14th birthday, I started a daily job at a small radio station. At 18, elected as president of a student organization, I took to the road full-time to travel and speak on its behalf. I've never left the platform since.

In other words, from the day I turned 14 — to this one — there has been an audience for what I have to say, and how I have to say it. I've been fortunate beyond description.

However, if I become irrelevant – taking the audience for granted — those wonderful readers and listeners would evaporate, instantly terminating the career I love so much.

That's why relevance is critical – and scary.

I discipline myself to read constantly, watch shows and sites targeted to other demographics, see avant-garde movies, and stay active on Social Media. I listen each week to Billboard's top songs via Spotify. I engage with what's impacting Millennials, not just Baby Boomers.

You can't pull the covers over your head and stay relevant by accident. You must actively participate in the current culture to ensure you're prepared for, and perhaps able to influence, whatever comes next.

Or else...

From Randy Pennington:

Here is my reality.

- New competitors arrive in my marketplace daily. According to their websites, each is the second coming of Peter Drucker.
- My performance review is delivered every day not annually.
- Longevity in the marketplace – like longevity with a company – used to mean more. Today, the line between value-added experience and being viewed as out of touch is excruciatingly thin.
- My value is determined by the complexity and importance of the problems I help my clients solve.
- My clients choose me because they believe that I provide value. That only happens if I am relevant.

You and your company are just like me. Your customers and employer are asking three questions: Why you? Why now? What makes you relevant today?

For me, staying relevant means that I must constantly:

- Understand my clients' current challenges and anticipate the ones they'll encounter tomorrow.
- Be a student of the world – knowing everything I can about what is happening in business, government, and the broader culture.
- Continuously improve my skills and execution.

- Take care of myself mentally, physically, and emotionally.

The privilege of doing what I do depends on remaining relevant. It is the same for you.

From Mark Sanborn:

There are three great fears most leaders possess: staying relevant is at the top of the list.

It makes sense: the ability to create results is dependent on relevance to customers, employees and shareholders. You never hear about successful products or leaders that are irrelevant.

Staying relevant means not resting on past success. I consider success as an early warning indicator for failure. As my pal Joe says, success means only that you know what worked yesterday.

The danger is that our thinking becomes frozen in time. Staying relevant requires “unfreezing” yourself. That means being immersed enough in the present to be able to understand it and speak to it.

Three suggestions:

1. Find a millennial to reverse mentor you,
2. Pay close attention to current culture even if you don't agree with it.
3. Run your ideas by your kids for feedback. They'll help keep you relevant.

From Joe Calloway:

In the context of business, I believe the key to relevance is

understanding your target market. My work is totally irrelevant to most of the marketplace, and that's fine with me.

I know my audience. I work with CEOs, business owners, and entrepreneurs. If my work, my "product," isn't relevant to them, then I'm out of business.

Like some of my friends here are saying, I also endeavor to be relevant in a cultural sense as well as in business matters.

This week in Chicago I spoke to an audience of business owners. I opened by saying that it must be absolutely great to live in Chicago right now, especially if you are a Cubs fan. With that new coach coming in, this will surely be the beginning of a dynasty!

Inside joke to forever frustrated Cubs fans, but the entire audience "got it" and I made a positive connection with them. I'm not a Cubs fan – not even a baseball fan, but I read. That bit of cultural relevance is a competitive advantage to me.

The real test, however, is that my business ideas must be relevant to their success. That's what I work on all day, every day.

From Larry Winget:

There are many ways to stay relevant. You can be innovative and create new products and services. Think Amazon Prime with Sunday delivery and video streaming (win) and Amazon Fire smartphone (fail).

You can flail around grasping at relevance and end up looking pitiful. Think Jesse Jackson. You can become a big deal to a small market and any kind of deal to a large market (I use both of these tactics.)

You can even change your look or your name. Think JCP and KFC. But be very clear: Staying relevant is hard. That's because relevance is rooted in change, growth and paying attention. While all three of those things are tough, they are especially tough when you are successful. Businesses in trouble are better at seeking relevance than those that are extremely successful. Failure makes you hungry and courageous to try things because you have nothing to lose.

Success creates a blindness of the need to pay attention, change and grow simply because you're busy being successful. That's why long term success is something to be admired because it requires taking care of business today while keeping an eye on what you have to do stay successful tomorrow.

The Five Friends on Life

Lessons From My Dad

From Mark Sanborn:

My father spoke much good advice with me, but he demonstrated even more.

What impacted me most happened one holiday season when I was a boy.

My father was a loan supervisor for a federal agency. It was against the rules to accept gifts of any kind, even if those gifts were given in sincere appreciation. Loan approvals had to be made fairly and without any expectation of reward from the borrower.

One day I came home from school and found a giant gift basket of fruit, candy and other goodies, beautifully wrapped and sitting on the porch of our home.

I was examining it closely and even considering opening it to grab a treat when my dad came out of the house. "Don't," he said. "It's a gift and as much as I appreciate the gesture, I can't take it. I'm sending it back." What I saw that day was my father living with integrity. I will never forget the advice of his example.

From Scott McKain:

It's impossible for me to describe how popular my father was back home. Suffice it to say that if I were elected President, my

hometown news would proclaim, "Dallas McKain's Son Wins!"

Our family owned a grocery in Crothersville, Indiana. The way my Dad treated people and served customers not only helped us survive when a supermarket came to town – we thrived to the point that the larger retailer closed.

The McKain's had a country music band — Dad sang and played lead guitar, with brothers on bass and rhythm. (And, for several years in my teens – me on drums!) We played just about every local dance, wedding, and event you could imagine. We opened concerts for Hall of Fame performers – and in some of the worst clubs you could imagine.

Regardless of the size of the venue, status of the audience, or condition of the crowd, I saw Dad engage every person with respect, giving attention to anyone who wanted his time.

When Dad passed, his obituary was the front page of the local newspaper.

Dallas McKain's best advice was that his life taught me that the highest calling is to serve – and demonstrate that you care about – others.

From Randy Pennington:

Like many in his generation, my Dad taught a lot without saying much. Here are four important lessons I carry with me today:

1. There is nothing nobler than hard work flawlessly executed. My Dad worked hard all of his life. He left home at age 16 to help support his family by working in the CCC camps. I took my first summer job at age 12 because he expected me to work.

- Starting at age 16, I was expected to work at least a part-time year round.
2. Live your beliefs – don't talk about them. My Dad had a strong faith, but he never broadcast it. And, he would never publicly condemn others if they didn't share his beliefs.
 3. Help others when you can. I remember my Dad walking out on the front porch; taking \$20 from his wallet; and giving it to an employee he supervised to help him make it through the week.
 4. Create a life of happy memories. The evening before he died, my Dad closed his eyes, recounted his life, and gently whispered, "Happy memories. So many happy memories." That is the true testament of a life well lived.

From Larry Winget:

My Dad was full of great advice. He never went to college or made much money but was full of love, laughter and country boy wisdom. These are some of my favorites:

"Smile, it don't cost nothing." The grammar isn't right, but the message is.

"The lazy man works the hardest." This one has a couple of messages: First, a lazy man will work harder getting out of work than he would have if he had just done the work. Second, respect the task enough to give it the necessary time and effort. I heard this one when I would try to carry too much so I wouldn't have to make two trips. Then I would drop stuff, maybe breaking it, and end up taking longer than if I had just made two trips.

"If you go to work for someone, give them their monies worth." If you don't, you are a thief because you are stealing their money by stealing the time you are being paid for.

"A man is only as good as his word." This one shaped me more than about any other set of words ever spoken to me.

From Joe Calloway:

"How much money have you saved up for it?" That's what my Dad would say when I told him that I wanted a bicycle, a motorcycle, a set of golf clubs, or whatever it was that I wanted at the time. The message, both spoken and by example, was simple: Go to work.

My Dad was a country banker. He also had a small dairy farm, which meant that before sunrise we milked the cows, took the milk to the processing plant, then went home and got ready for school and work. Same thing in the evening. We milked the cows.

The advice of "you can have and accomplish pretty much anything you want if you're willing to work for it" imbued me with a work ethic that runs from my head down to the tips of my toes. If the sun is up, I feel the need to be doing constructive work.

Sometimes, it's been almost to a fault. It's taken me a long time to learn to chill out and not feel guilty for not working all hours of the day. But, trust me, I've gotten pretty good at it now.

"If you want it, work for it."

Lessons From My Dog

From Joe Calloway:

Scout is a Cavalier King Charles Spaniel. He teaches three great lessons:

Be glad to see everybody. Scout breaks out into massive and enthusiastic tail-wagging no matter who comes around. Certainly with any of the family he's goofy with joy to see us. But it extends to our friends and even total strangers. Scout is always willing to give anybody the benefit of the doubt and expect the best from them unless proven otherwise.

Accept the love. People are sometimes uncomfortable accepting compliments, good deeds, positive attention, or expressions and demonstrations of love. Scout has no problem with any of that. He lives his life as if it is utterly, totally normal for everybody to absolutely adore him. When he gets gooey attention and affection from everyone, his attitude seems to be that everything in the universe is in perfect order. All is as it should be.

Tend to people when they need it. Scout has an uncanny sense of when one of us doesn't feel well or is upset about something. If Cate, for example, has been crying, Scout will go straight to her, rest his chin on her leg, and just sit with her until she feels better. Now that's a lesson.

From Mark Sanborn:

We own two Toy Fox Terriers. They are little mutts that weigh about 5 pounds each. Grace and Bella are beloved family members and they continually remind me of three very important things:

Happiness in the moment. When I get up to feed them in the morning they couldn't be any more happy or excited even though someone feeds them every single morning. Seeing them zip around and jump up and down in anticipation brings a smile to my face even when I'm tired and grumpy.

Laser-like focus. Obviously, these mutts love to eat. They eat with ferocious abandon. They lick their bowls until I think they're going to wear a hole in the metal. Then they search thoroughly to make sure they haven't missed anything I might have dropped. I'd like to always bring that kind of focus to the important things I do.

Reciprocal love and affection. We love our dogs because they love us. Even when we fail or are unpleasant, they still love us. How many other people or creatures can we say that about? Their reciprocity is proof that to have more love in your life, be more loving.

From Scott McKain:

Ironically, I had just started to write this, when I looked and saw that our 7-month-old puppy, Lucy, had her eyes half-shut, and was about to topple over.

As she is usually non-stop energy, Tammy and I tried to awaken her and see if we could figure out what was wrong – to no avail. Scooping her up in my arms, I ran to the car to make the quick trip to our nearby pet hospital. I thought she might have been bitten by a snake, or somehow found a pill accidentally dropped.

By our arrival, Lucy was coming around a little. After an examination by the veterinarian, we're still at a loss as to what happened. Perhaps a seizure – maybe a circulation problem? We hope to know more soon.

What I've learned – reinforced just today– is the depth of caring we have for our dogs. Immanuel Kant wrote, "We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals."

It's not a coincidence that my friends here all have similar attitudes about their dogs that I do concerning mine. The caring they have – as I have for Bonzo and Lucy – hopefully reflects how we feel about the world.

From Randy Pennington:

Jackson is a Parti Poodle. Regular Poodles are one color. Parti's are bred to be black and white. Every dog has a unique personality, and Jackson is no different. Here are three lessons he teaches:

Keep your eyes on what's important. Jackson's favorite toy is a ball. And, he always knows the location of at least one of them. If it is important, keep your eyes on it.

Stay close to those you love. Jackson has loved my wife since the day we picked him up. He lives in our home, but he is definitely her dog first. He spends 98 percent of his day on my wife's desk, curled up in a box under her desk, or on the sofa across the room so that he can keep an eye on her.

Sometimes you have to say "Screw it. I'm going for it." Jackson is a bolter. He knows that he's not supposed to run loose in the neighborhood, but there are times when he can't help himself. He pauses for a moment like he knows he will be in trouble and then goes for it. Sometimes you gotta do what you gotta do.

From Larry Winget:

Ralphie is an English Bulldog. Gus is a French Bulldog. I am a Pitbull. All of these bulldogs love each other unconditionally. My boys have taught me much about life and relationships. If you have a dog, you will recognize these lessons.

- Eat when you're hungry and quit when you're full.
- Naps are good.
- When someone wants to pet you, slow down and enjoy it.
- Be nice: there might be a treat in it for you.
- Going for a walk makes life better.
- There is plenty to be excited about; especially, the doorbell.
- Don't hold grudges.
- When someone is mad and screaming, it's not always about you. Stay out of it.
- A ball is more fun than TV.
- I don't care who you are, what you do for a living, how much money you have or what you're wearing; if you are nice, I'll like you.
- Always be ready for anything: if you aren't, you might miss something.
- Snuggling on a rainy day is a hard thing to beat.

Look! There's a bird!!!!!!

What Made You Decide To Do What You Do?

From Scott McKain:

The back row of Loeb Playhouse at Purdue. I was just an 8th grader — listening to a speaker who moved me to think about my life and potential in a different manner than before. That's where it started...

A student organization – FFA – gave me the opportunity to serve as a state and national officer. I dedicated two years to speak to students, parents, and professionals across the nation. By the age of 21, I had met with the President in the Oval Office, dined in the boardroom with the Chairman of GM, and chatted privately with Bob Hope.

Later, I worked as a fundraiser for my alma mater with an annual salary of \$12,000. After gifts to the college almost doubled, they offered a raise – to \$13,000. I decided that a career in higher education wasn't my future.

My peers from college were earning exponentially higher salaries climbing the corporate ladder. I loaded my car with meager possessions and drove from speech to speech in a myriad of towns. I was paying my dues. I wanted to become excellent at my craft – believing that if I did, success would become inevitable.

That worked for me – just as it can for you.

From Joe Calloway:

In 1978 I moved across the country to go into the real estate business. Shortly after joining a small firm, I became the sales manager, then general manager. Part of my job was to lead a meeting of all of the agents every morning. What I liked about that was the challenge of coming up with ideas that could help all of those agents be more successful, as 100% of my pay was determined by their success.

After that job, I move back to Nashville, took that “help them succeed” experience and began offering workshops to businesses around town. After living on the edge of starvation and holding on by my fingernails for a couple of years, things started to catch on. Occasionally, someone would ask me to give a speech to their trade association or company meeting. From those jobs, little by little I learned how to do keynote speaking.

In 2004 my first book was published, and I have since developed a great enthusiasm for writing. I’d love to make a living 100% from writing, and if I can manage to make my next book good enough, maybe I’ll reach that goal.

From Larry Winget:

My business went belly-up and I lost everything I had. I had a choice to make: get a job or figure out how to make a living doing what I love most: being the center of attention. My ego won out and I became a speaker. I started as a sales trainer, then became a motivational humorist and ended up The Pitbull Of Personal Development®.

From the beginning, I busted my ass to learn how to get really good at telling a story, communicate ideas and be entertaining. But just as

important, was that I never forgot that speaking is a business. No room for passion, love or ego in my business plan: I ran my speaking career like a business. I had a product (me) and I learned how to sell it at a profit, bring great value to my audiences, how to become one-of-a-kind and exploit it all via speeches, books, audio and video.

Later, I was able to add television to the mix because of the uniqueness of my style and the way I articulate my point of view. I have been fortunate, but I worked hard to become good enough to be where I am today.

From Mark Sanborn:

At the age of 10 I entered my first public speaking contest. I did so badly and was so embarrassed that I committed myself to learning how to be an effective public speaker. I entered every youth competition I could find and practiced constantly. Because of my young age I got invited to speak to civic groups and even churches giving short messages about motivation and patriotism (at the time, mostly ideas I'd read from great books).

In high school I developed an interest in leadership. I was able to combine my speaking abilities with my leadership skills and get elected to state and national office in the FFA, an experience that further fueled my interests.

When I was 16, I drove 90 minutes to hear Og Mandino speak. That's when I fully realized some people were able to make a living speaking and writing.

I have a passion for ideas and sharing them through the spoken and written word. Although my formal education is in economics, my life education has been in sharing ideas through speaking and writing.

I'm blessed to have made my living for the past 29 years doing just that.

From Randy Pennington:

Looking back, much of my life was preparation for what I do today. I started playing in bands at 12 and ended up performing at Six Flags Over Texas. I wrote sports for the local newspaper in high school; learned how to hold a group's attention as a Water Safety Instructor; and became fascinated with how organizations succeed in graduate school.

But, I had no idea that this could be a career until I read *In Search of Excellence* and saw Tom Peters present. I naively said, "I can do that."

My first "paid gigs" were three years of management seminars for the local community college while I worked as an administrator at a child and adolescent psychiatric facility. Full-time consulting and training began when a boutique consulting firm convinced me that I could broaden my impact by joining them. Speaking and writing were a natural outgrowth.

I made partner and might still be there except for a philosophical disagreement with the majority partner. So you could say I was born to do this on my own or that I was pushed into it. Either way, I worked – and continue to work – my butt off to earn the right to be here.

How Do I Stay Inspired?

From Mark Sanborn:

The quick answer is that my greatest inspiration comes from my faith, family and friends, in that order.

While true, that answer is incomplete. On a practical level there is a fourth thing that helps me stay inspired, and that is focus.

There are four valuable activities that produce the greatest growth, satisfaction and revenue in my business. They are:

1. Study and research
2. Creation (of intellectual property that drives my speaking, writing and advising)
3. Delivery
4. Relationship building (with business colleagues and strategic partners)

These aren't just things I need to do; they are the things I most enjoy doing in my business.

Of course they aren't the only things I do. Much of each day could be consumed by routines and activities that are necessary and sometimes even important, but neither strategic or rewarding. I delegate those tactical activities, or at the least streamlining them so I have more time for my primary focus of four.

Much has been written about building on strengths. Another key is to focus on doing more of those things that you enjoy or are passionate about that are also profitable personally and professionally.

From Scott McKain:

I recently read an interesting article in Forbes from August Turak that changed how I'm approaching what creates inspiration for me. Turak's post stated, in essence, that we have the inspiration thing all backwards.

Frankly, I tended to seek external inspiration, hoping it would somehow move me to take better actions in my profession and personal life. Before I read that article, I would've written exactly the same thing for you to read in this post! I was going to tell you about inspirational music I listen to, favorite books that I re-read, friends (specifically, the ones here in Five Friends) who – through their consistent excellence – inspire me to hold myself to a higher standard.

However, Turak suggests, "It may seem that inspiration leads to action, but the counter-intuitive truth is that action leads to inspiration." I believe he's right.

To get inspired, I now begin by taking some kind of action. Sure, it's baby steps at the beginning, but I've discovered that nothing inspires like progress! For example, it's discipline to get the outline of a new book done – but, when I see progress toward completion, I feel a jolt of inspiration.

Want to get inspired? **START. DO something!**

From Randy Pennington:

People often get into my business because of their passion or purpose. They feel called to pursue a mission. Most days, I enjoy what I do, and it is incredibly fun when everything aligns to produce

something magical.

It is easy to stay excited when everything is perfect. The things that keep you inspired should be there even in the tough times. These three things do it for me:

1. Fulfilling my responsibility to the best of my ability. Following through on a commitment is important to me. If I don't work, I don't eat. I owe my family being good every day. And, I owe it to every client regardless of what they are paying. Nobody signs up for the "mail it in and be mediocre" fee.
2. Helping clients solve their problems. Being the "sage on the stage" is fun, but nothing beats seeing people actually delivering positive results and knowing that I contributed.
3. Discovering and applying new stuff. For me, everything starts with the idea. But ideas without application have little benefit.

It isn't sexy or glamorous. But beauty fades, and if you are lucky, you can find something lasting to keep you inspired.

From Larry Winget:

My inspiration is divided into two categories: Professional and Personal.

My professional inspiration doesn't come from unicorns and rainbows as is the case with way too many in the self-help industry. Mine is just the opposite. I am inspired by societal stupidity. When the stupidity fires me up to the point that I just can't leave it alone, then I am inspired to speak up and write a book about it. It makes me personally feel better to get that frustration outside of me and luckily my opinions on the matter seem to resonate with others, resulting in a fine career for me.

My personal inspiration comes from really simple things. My wife and I are happy and still in love as well as being best friends after 33 years. My sons have grown into successful, responsible men with great families of their own. My three grandsons remind me that life has cycles and while I am slowly on my way out, they will remain to create something totally new. My dogs make me smile and calm me. I have a small handful of buddies I trust and who challenge my thinking.

Life is good.

From Joe Calloway:

Ideas. New ideas. Good ideas. Creative, edgy ideas. Ideas that take an age old concept and change it in a way that creates more value. Ideas that challenge my thinking, get in my face and force me to see things from a perspective that I was sure I disagreed with. Ideas about architecture, food, travel, politics, fashion, and business.

I am in love with ideas and that's what keeps me inspired. Every morning I read four newspapers, go to five news websites, and check out the last fifty or so tweets from Forbes, Fortune, and the Harvard Business Review. I read every word of Politico every morning down to the last period on the last sentence. I go to the "I Require Art" site to see everything from Chagall to Picasso to Renoir. I read Garden & Gun magazine (very little about gardens or guns in it) and Local Palate (best magazine ever), and 20 other magazines regularly.

I devour ideas because they keep my mind alive and kicking. It's also my job. My clients expect me to be informed. Mostly I just get jazzed by new ideas. Some people are afraid of new ideas. I'm usually more afraid of the old ones.

What Is Your Best Habit?

From Randy Pennington:

This is a difficult question for me. I think I do pretty well at staying current in order to stay relevant in my professional life. I challenge myself to examine different viewpoints. I haven't missed a daily workout more than 50 times in the past 15 years. And, I make a conscious effort to let my wife know that I love her every day.

Those are all pretty good habits. But, I'm not sure that any of them are my "Best" one. In fact, I am the last one of the Five Friends to turn in my piece because I have been thinking about this question for days. This confirms what my friends know: one of my worst habits is a tendency to over-think stuff.

So here is what I believe to be my best habit: I never give up on trying to be better at things that are important to me. It's not that I'm a self-development junkie. I simply am rarely convinced and sometimes paranoid that my best today won't be up to my own standards tomorrow.

I haven't always had this habit. But, I'll keep it until I overanalyze it out of existence.

From Mark Sanborn:

My colleagues have shared several habits that I also benefit from. Thinking and reading are critical for me as a speaker and author, but critical for anyone who wants to lead well and live fully.

Another habit that has served me well for my entire adult life is exercise. I expect that to elicit a ho-hum response. Everyone knows it

is a good idea but far fewer do it regularly. As an overweight kid I used running to drop the extra weight. The discipline of running, I learned, could be applied to other areas of my life. And that's a key benefit of exercise: it develops discipline.

It has also been shown to be as effective as medication in treating some mood disorders. It also enables quicker recovery from illness and setbacks.

And it doesn't have to be onerous. I no longer run or bike the long distances I once did. Now my goal is 20 minutes of activity a day, whether lifting, running or cycling.

And if I don't feel great about exercising when I start, I always do after I finish.

From Larry Winget:

I stay current. One of the biggest issues facing us today is that people don't choose to make a habit of informing themselves about what is going on in the world. They have decided they are somehow above it all and that what is "trending" is beneath them. No, it's what keeps you relevant. Being uninformed makes you irrelevant. I choose relevance so I choose to stay current.

I do my best to know what is going on in the world, my country, my state and my city. I work to be informed about government, health, finance, business, entertainment, fashion and just about every other area. I stay informed by reading blogs, articles, magazines and books. I start my day with GoogleNews and YahooNews as well as skimming the news channels for the news of the day. I seek out a variety of opinions on all topics to broaden my understanding. I talk about what's going on with friends like the guys who write this blog in order to surround myself with others who are current and have

different opinions. This habit allows me to have better conversations with my online followers, my friends and my audiences.

From Scott McKain:

My best habit is daily thinking.

You're probably saying, "Hey – I think every day, too!" However, I mean that I have developed the habit of making time each morning for contemplation and creativity.

I heard an executive say to his team, "Our problem is that we think about what we're doing – but we aren't thinking about what we're doing." While that sentence isn't elegant, my guess is you understand what he was attempting to convey.

Most of us think about how we can execute what is required to accomplish our assignments. Few, however, contemplate on the bigger issues facing our organizations and the customers we seek to serve.

Want to develop the habit of daily contemplation? Here's my advice: In the quiet of the morning, take a legal pad and consider the bigger issues that our daily stress and obligations often prevent us from considering. Simply write down what you're thinking in a "stream of consciousness" manner. You'll be amazed how your creativity and insight will flourish.

Deep thinking is like building a muscle – the more you exercise your mind in a habitual manner, the stronger it will become. Try it! It will become a great habit for you, too.

From Joe Calloway:

I don't want to be repetitive, so I will think of it as reinforcement to say that, like Larry, I stay current. I read. I read everything. Reading, especially reading that with which I tend to disagree, has benefits too long to list. So that's my first helpful habit.

But since Larry already claimed that turf, here's another, equally beneficial, useful, and empowering habit. I get up early. For me, that's 5:00AM on a normal day, 4:00AM during times in which I've got a project on my plate that requires maximum clarity and creativity.

If it's the weekend and there is absolutely nothing to do, I get up early. I can't help it, I can't quit it, and I don't want to.

Scott talked about doing his daily contemplation in the quiet of the morning. I totally get it. For me, the hour before sunrise is the absolute best time of day. My thoughts are clear, I am at my most creative, and it's when I do my best work.

Whatever your "best" time of day is, I encourage you to be intentional about the habit of putting that time to good use. Don't waste it.

The Big Lies That Are Hurting People That People LOVE To Believe

From Mark Sanborn:

“You can have it all.” No, you really can’t.

Some of the unhappiest people I know are those who bought into that whopper. They lack priorities, choose uncomplimentary or conflicting values and wear themselves out pursuing every activity.

Try eating all you want and keeping your weight at a healthy level.

Try traveling non-stop for business or pleasure and have meaningful relationships at home. Try working long hours seven days a week and see how much leisure you’ll enjoy.

Everything of importance has value, and value has an associated cost. Trying to “have it all” doesn’t acknowledge the reality of time constraints. It is spending the currency of your life like a drunken sailor.

The bad news is that you can’t have it all.

The good news is that when you know what’s important, you don’t want it all anyway.

Broaden your focus too much by trying to “have it all” and you’ll get only a tiny bit if anything at all.

Narrow your focus and you can go richer and deeper in those areas of your life that truly matter.

From Joe Calloway:

The shortcut.

What bothers me is that so many people spend their money on the promise of short cuts to success.

There aren't any short cuts.

I see "How To Make A Fortune On The Internet" programs that begin with the premise of

"First, get 100,000 followers.....THEN all you have to do is follow my easy plan to make a million dollars in a year."

What they skip over is that to get those 100,000 followers, you have to have something to say that is so valuable, so compelling, that people feel they can't afford to miss one word of it – ever. That takes experience.

I do coaching with professional speakers, and the thing we always come back to is simply this: value creation. Public Notice to my potential speaking clients: "I have NO shortcuts for you."

As many, including my buddy Mark Sanborn, have said, it generally takes 15 years to become an "overnight success."

You can't become an expert in a week. Put in the time, do the work, create value. Don't learn the "tricks of the trade." Learn the trade.

The only people that get rich from short cuts....are the people selling the short cuts.

From Randy Pennington:

I grew up hearing every motivational message imagined or printed in the Reader's Digest. I heard lots of advice that isn't necessarily true. Consider these:

- Laughter is the best medicine. I want great drugs when I'm in pain not a standup routine.
- Better safe than sorry. Mark Twain said: "Twenty years from now you will be more disappointed by the things that you didn't do than by the ones you did do." I like his idea better.
- It's never too late to pursue your dreams. I grew up dreaming of playing Division I college basketball and replacing Ringo as the drummer in the Beatles. I am too late for both.
- Attitude is everything. No. Talent, knowledge, and skill count, too.
- Great minds think alike. The older I get the more I realize that we need great minds who view the world through a different lens rather than the same one.

Here's my takeaway: Any motivational or business guru who tells you that the secret to your success is doing exactly what they say without questioning its application to your situation should be avoided ... except for the Five Friends. Our ideas are timeless pearls of wisdom.

From Larry Winget:

Passion. Passion is defined as "an uncontrollable emotion." Do you want an uncontrollable emotion anywhere near your business? Not me.

If you need quadruple bypass surgery, do you want a passionate surgeon or one who is damn good at surgery? How about a waiter? I don't want a passionate waiter, I want a waiter who is great at his job.

I don't need any emotion involved, especially one that is uncontrolled. I only want excellence and hard work from the people I do business with. They don't have to like it, love it, enjoy it or be passionate about it, just damn good at it. I know too many who are passionate: passionately incompetent.

Some will argue that passion is the fuel that lights the fire of hard work and excellence. Save it. I've heard it all before. I am good at what I do because I approach the fiduciary commitment that I have to my clients with integrity. I am hired to be good and I am committed to being good because they are paying me to be good. Very simple. No passion. I have passion for my family and I'm damn good at my job.

From Scott McKain:

The most ridiculous concept ever foisted upon gullible professionals is the idiotic maxim: "You can't manage what you can't measure."

(My vote for second worst: "Getting the right people on the bus is more important than where the bus is going." That's moronic. The "right people" won't get on if they don't know where the hell the bus is headed. I digress...)

Leaders are constantly challenged to manage the immeasurable. Employee attitudes, marketplace opportunities, and customer engagement aren't exclusively intended for an Excel spreadsheet.

Leadership is art and science; insight and data. The distinctive leader

is able to use head and heart to drive greater performance.

When we integrate this ridiculous “we can only manage what we can measure” approach into our culture, it means we assume the only elements that matter to the organization are aspects that lend themselves to measurement.

A restaurant, therefore, focuses upon speed of food delivery (measurable) rather than friendly service (not) – when it’s the combination of both that is essential for a superior customer experience. The same is true for your business.

Interestingly, the “management/measurement” quote is often incorrectly attributed to W. Edwards Deming – who insisted instead, “The most important things cannot be measured.”

What You Should and Shouldn't Sacrifice To Reach Your Goals

From Joe Calloway:

I found this definition of sacrifice: "to give up something for something else considered more important." I'm going with that.

If you've set the right goal, you should sacrifice pretty much anything and everything for it, because if it's your goal – then you've decided it's most important.

If, for example, making money truly is your goal, and it's more important to you than, for example, family or relationships, then take every job, never be home, and when you are at home stay in your office and do stuff that will make money for you.

If, however, you've set having a happy, fulfilled, loving family as your goal, then do whatever it takes to make that happen, including making enough money to provide what your family needs.

Sorry, but you can't have it all. You can, however, have what's most important to you. That's just a matter of making the right sacrifices.

For me, what's most important is family, friends, and relationships. I'll sacrifice some money for that.

From Mark Sanborn:

I agree with Joe: you can't have it all.

But I learned something important from a pastor friend who added,

“...but when you know what is really important, you don’t want it all anyway.”

The unhappiest people I know are the people trying to “have it all:” the perfect home, manicured lawn, most influential social circles, the highest status car, meaningful relationships and lots of free time. They are unhappy because they don’t understand the concept of sacrifice.

When you sacrifice nothing, you get nothing. An unwillingness to sacrifice ultimately means that you don’t know or aren’t sure what is truly important.

He or she is no fool who gives up something of lesser value for greater value, and that is the essence of sacrifice. Perhaps as hard as making a sacrifice is the hard work of drilling down to what really matters to you.

From Larry Winget:

At first glance, it’s an easy question. Never sacrifice your health, family, or integrity. Past that, it gets tougher. If something is really important to you (and your goal should be really important otherwise it’s just a desire or a “would like to have” and not a goal) then you must understand that there will be plenty of sacrifice ahead of you.

And if you aren’t doing some sacrificing, then your goal isn’t challenging enough. You will have to sacrifice some meals, some sleep, some family time, some money, some personal time, your old way of thinking and acting and much, MUCH more. Sacrifice is a natural part of achievement. The only way to GET is to GIVE UP. You don’t get rich, you give up what is making you broke. You don’t get skinny, you give up what is making you fat. You don’t get happy, you give up what is making you unhappy. You don’t get your goal, you

give up what is keeping you from reaching your goal. Pick a goal, then make a list of what you are willing to sacrifice and what you aren't, then go to work!

From Scott McKain:

You...me...all of us...have been lied to.

We've been told that we can "have it all" – but, that's nothing more than a damnable lie. As all of my friends have noted, we have to make choices. We have to sacrifice one aspect of life we want, for another that we desire even more.

My first wife (who passed from cancer after twenty-five years of marriage) loved her career as much as I love mine – and we chose not to have children. Was that decision good or bad? The answer, of course, is: yes.

I know she was extraordinarily happy and thrilled in her work – and, I in mine. I know our friendships were deep, rich, and rewarding. Yes, there are extraordinary parts of life that we relinquished. The important point is that it was the right choice for us. We sacrificed the joys of parenthood for a different type of fulfillment.

Sadly, what many people give up...is themselves. Not making a decision IS making a choice. It's deciding to delay...to defer...to somehow die. It's giving up what YOU want for what your family predicts, a boss presumes, or your friends presuppose.

You can't have it all...but you can be successful at something. When you make the right choices for you...the truth is that "something" can be spectacular.

From Randy Pennington:

This question begs for a finite answer in a world of infinite (and relative) choices. And that's why my answer is sacrifice everything or sacrifice nothing – it is your choice.

What you will or won't have to sacrifice to reach your goal depends on a number of variables that are completely personal to you: importance and difficulty of the challenge; time horizon to achieve it; your starting point; your life circumstances; your support system; your resources; and even luck.

When it comes to achieving goals, most of us never honestly assess the variables; make the conscious choice about what is and isn't important; and embrace the discipline and sacrifice to achieve them.

Set an easy goal, and there will be very little or even no sacrifice. Set an insanely challenging goal, and you will have to give something up.

And if you aren't willing to give up something to reach that big audacious goal, there is a good chance that you will sacrifice reaching your goal.

What's Right And What's Wrong With Our Role Models Today?

From Larry Winget:

Role models are nothing more than a reflection of what we value.

When we value honesty, integrity, doing the right thing, morals, good parenting, leadership and hard work, we will have role models who exemplify those values. Since we instead value fame, celebrity, being pretty and living an ostentatious life style those are the role models we find ourselves with. When we elevate our values we will elevate our role models.

It's fine to admire what a person accomplishes in business, sports or the financial world, but it's stupid to turn them into a role model unless they are the kind of person you want your child to grow up to be. For instance: Steve Jobs quotes are posted on social media every day as if he a guru of business, yet he screwed over his partners. Some great football players beat their girlfriends. Tiger is the greatest golfer who ever lived but he is not a good guy. Before we hold any person up as a role model, we need to look at more than what they do, what they have and how they look. We must look at who they are and how they live.

From Scott McKain:

In 1993, Charles Barkley said something – via a Nike commercial he personally wrote – that was quite astounding.

“I am not a role model. A million guys who can dunk a basketball are in jail. Should they be role models?”

Athletes as role models were formerly appropriate because the press only reported their redeeming qualities. We never heard of Mickey Mantle's problems with alcohol, Babe Ruth's womanizing, or Ty Cobb's racism. Now, we all know of steroid abuse, domestic violence, and drug addiction in sports — as well as entertainment, politics, and about every other walk of life.

Here's the challenge – separating the message from the messenger.

Jimmy Swaggart failing in his personal life doesn't mean the Bible was wrong. Michael Jordan may not be a nice guy, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't learn from his dedication to excellence.

It's our personal responsibility to determine what we desire to accomplish – then, find a role model who has succeeded in that area, using their standard of performance to motivate us in a specific aspect.

Just as we all have fallen short in our personal endeavors, we have to realize that our role models don't need to be all-encompassing examples of inspiration.

From Randy Pennington:

I had heroes growing up just like every little kid. Along the way, I learned that many of them had feet of clay. That is no different today.

I also had role models. They taught me important life lessons about being productive, responsible, and honorable. If you are lucky, your heroes can also be your role models.

It is difficult for heroes and role models today. Immediate information exposes real life to the world much quicker. It isn't that the heroes

and role models of our youth were so much better than the ones today. It is that the illusion of their goodness is more easily stripped away.

The real problem isn't a lack of role models. It is us.

We have confused being good at something or famous with being a role model. And, we have decided to celebrate, aspire to, or explain away the character flaws and failures of those we seek to emulate.

My father came to a stop sign on an empty country road. He stopped completely and looked both ways. My mother, telling me this story many years later, asked him why he stopped when no one was around or watching. My father nodded to my brother and I in the back seat and said, "There are four eyes watching my every move."

That's a role model and one of my true heroes. Anyone who thinks that is strange, hokey, or old-fashioned is what's wrong with our role models today.

From Joe Calloway:

America's number one role model is fame.

Sadly, in our society what seems to be admired, prized, and revered more than anything is quite simply fame. If you're famous, then you're admired. You can be famous for good, for bad, or just for being famous (Paris Hilton, Kim Kardashian). If you're famous, people will flock to be near you, to have their picture made with you, and many of them will want to be just like you.

How many people choose a teacher or a master carpenter or a single mom working two jobs to provide for her kids as a role model? Not

many. More often we admire singers, dancers, movie stars, and anyone who gets on TV. Personally, I don't get it. What makes someone worthy of adoration or admiration simply because they do their job in front of lots of people?

By the way, you can be a great role model and be famous, but you shouldn't be a role model because you're famous.

My role models tend to be great dads. I doubt you've ever heard of any of them.

From Mark Sanborn:

Role models greatly impact learning and development. There's no debate about that.

Positive role models provide us both example and inspiration. We can see the reality of a life well lived rather than just learn about the abstract concept. In addition to living role models, history also offers a buffet of role models to choose from. (One advantage in choosing role models from history is that you know how their lives ended up.)

The danger is picking the wrong role model. We often confuse greatness with fame. Greatness is about what you give. Fame is about what you get. Contribution is the hallmark of greatness, not attention.

Be careful in selecting your role models, and take just as much responsibility in being the kind of person others would benefit from choosing as a role model for themselves. It might just make you a better person.

The Five Friends on the Government

Who Should Run The Government: CEO or Politician?

From Randy Pennington:

Everyone running for political office is by choice a politician. The candidate who says, "I am not a politician" is simply saying that they are new to the game.

The important question when electing a President is whether to trust the running of the government to someone with no experience working in that environment over someone with at least some experience understanding how it works.

Every President is an amateur managing a group of professionals when it comes to providing leadership for government agencies. That is not unlike successfully running a large company with multiple products and services.

But, "running the government" also involves influencing when you have no authority to mandate compliance; building coalitions among groups with different goals; operating in a state of perpetual scrutiny; and understanding how the process of government works.

It isn't impossible for the right business CEO to succeed without any

prior government experience. It is, however, more difficult unless they have acquired those skills elsewhere.

Republicans hold up Ronald Reagan—an actor and politician—as the standard for great leadership. The Democrats point to Bill Clinton—a career politician. You can't underestimate the importance of understanding and being competent in how government works.

From Scott McKain:

“Elected political leader as manager” is a dated, misplaced notion. Let's change our thinking about the jobs of those we elect to significant positions.

I never thought Jack Welch was an expert on nuclear power or broadcasting – even though GE did both while he was CEO. Yet, we seemingly want our President to know everything about every issue. That's humanly impossible.

“The expectations surrounding presidential performance far outstrip the institutional capacity of Presidents to perform,” said Terry Moe of Stanford University.

The President's actual role is more like “chairman of the nation” or “chief political officer.” It is to provide leadership by steering us toward consensus on critical issues and making tough decisions on major policy issues.

We've reached a point where we actually need two Presidents – better expressed as Chairman and CEO. The Chairman (President of the U.S.) is elected as our “big picture” political leader. He or she then appoints a CEO to be an aggressive, rigorous manager of budgets and performance. Companies separate these positions.

Why shouldn't the government?

Until we become more sensible in our expectations, we'll have unqualified politicians trying to be executives...business leaders trying to be politicians...and neither delivering the best results for America.

From Larry Winget:

When it comes to running the government, I believe that it takes a good combination of business acumen as well as the ability to both understand and use the political machine to get things done.

A businessperson who can't get things done using the political system and only wants to trash the system and do a work around is doomed. A politician who doesn't understand the basic business principles that a CEO has to master to be successful as well as profitable is also doomed.

We either need a politician with business mastery or a businessperson with political mastery. It is going to take a combination of both skill sets to move us forward.

Balancing a budget, spending less than you take in, controlling growth, understanding the competition, defending your establishment against outsiders, pleasing the people who pay the bills and creating value both real and perceived are the role of a good businessperson.

But they should also be the top priorities of a person running the government. We need a proactive visionary consensus builder. We don't need a know-it-all demagogue who believes they are the only one who can have a good idea.

From Joe Calloway:

Republican presidential candidate and Governor of Ohio John Kasich recently said, "People have kind of had it with politicians because they don't think it's working. I spent a decade out. At some point people want a captain to land the plane. I know when you go to Washington you better understand where the levers are."

I think that's a good point. A career politician might not have the "get things done" skills that a good CEO has, but a career business professional doesn't know "where the levers are" in government. Candidate Carly Fiorina has said, "I come from a world outside of politics, where track records and accomplishments count." (Her own track record at Hewlett-Packard is questionable, at best.)

The bottom line is, as Mark, says, getting a good leader, regardless of their background. I think a good example of the kind of a "hybrid" leadership background can be found in Sen. Bob Corker of Tennessee. Very successful in business, former Mayor of Chattanooga, now a respected (by both sides of the aisle) US Senator.

We need a combination of vision, inspiration, the skills of communication and collaboration, and the ability to "make the trains run on time."

From Mark Sanborn:

The short answer: someone qualified, whether CEO or politician. But what makes someone qualified?

Start by flipping the original question: who should run a company? A politician? That would be nonsensical if that person didn't also have

business leadership skills.

Skill sets aren't always transferrable. While the principles of leadership don't change, the application of those principles does. How a leader gets results in a business organization may be similar to government, but it isn't the same. The systems and processes are different by design.

That isn't to say that a CEO couldn't make a great president, but it wouldn't be exclusively because of his or her business acumen. Many great government leaders have come out of the private sector, but they succeeded by doing a deep dive—or in some instances, a crash course—in how government works.

One thing that is the same in business and government is that an effective leader surrounds himself or herself with talented, capable people. That enables the person at the top to make up for any shortfalls in knowledge or skills.

Who do I want running our government? Someone who truly knows what they're doing.

What Is The One Thing You Would Do To Fix The Economy?

From Joe Calloway:

Fix the economy by electing grown-ups.

I don't quite know what to write about this, because with the attitudes of most people being firmly locked in an intransigent "we're right and they're wrong" position, the idea that we might elect grown-ups may be a pipe dream.

When I say elect grown-ups I mean elect men and women who can articulate solutions, not just spew partisan, whip-the-party-faithful-into-a-frenzy crap (I chose that word carefully) that appeals to the lowest common denominator of people who are incapable of critical thinking.

There are grown-ups in Congress on both sides who can point across the aisle and say "we can work with her or him." They know who the other grown-ups are.

In Tennessee, where I live, there is one Democratic Congressman (Cooper) and one Republican Senator (Corker) who are grown-ups. They know how to get to solutions. They're smart. They listen. They think. They are pragmatists who are interested in moving forward.

From Mark Sanborn:

If you want to fix the economy, remember that there is no such thing as a free lunch: if someone eats for free, somebody else has to pay

for it. The belief that entitlements are “free” is not only erroneous but dangerous.

Resources spent on entitlements come from the productive sector, usually in the form of taxes. Individuals and companies who produce are taxed on their productive efforts. The money spent on entitlements may be humanitarian but it can't be used to start or grow companies or invested productively. Entitlements generally may help people, but they don't help grow an economy.

That isn't to say we shouldn't help those that need it; the problem is the increasing number of individual and programs that expect assistance and in recent years there have been more and more of them. Society should help those that cannot help themselves, but not those who will not help themselves.

The economy and all who contribute will improve when we improve when we offer to those who really need help, and not those who simply want it.

From Larry Winget:

Teach people to be more responsible and smarter with their money, get government to run like a business, create more jobs and get more people working, fewer entitlements and no more bailouts. All good ideas. But all take too long to have an impact.

So, here you go: A 15% across the board cut on all government spending. No more “let's cut this and let's cut that.” When you pick and choose, it becomes partisan and political and nothing gets done. So, cut everything by 15%. Defense, education, wages, utilities, people, roads, even paper and staples . . . all of it. Not one exception. No department is spared. And don't say, “Larry!!! Not education. Not welfare. Not feeding children!!!” That's the problem,

we want to play favorites and everyone says, "Cut spending, but not MY spending."

Bottom line: Government is too big and there is way more than 15% waste in every area. So mandate a 15% cut to every budget with the condition that services and service levels are not affected. Force efficiency since they can't do it on their own.

From Scott McKain:

Focus on improving the relationship between government and small business.

For all the tax and infrastructure benefits offered to gain 1000 jobs, my wager is that 200 small businesses each hiring five new people has greater impact on the local community – yet, those entrepreneurs receive none of the incentives a big corporation mandates.

What if there were no corporate taxes for businesses that gross under \$2 million? How many new employees could those entrepreneurs now hire? The owner will be paying more in taxes, as it's reasonable to assume that her personal income would rise. More people would be employed, moving them from unemployment benefits and food stamps into taxpayers. It is a true "win-win."

What if we placed a higher premium on creating companies rather than moving money? We need to stimulate more Steve Jobs and Bill Gates...and fewer Bernie Madoffs. When there's more money in manipulation of currency, stock, and markets than there is in building businesses and creating jobs...something is out of alignment.

When a big company offers to create 500 jobs, governmental leaders fawn over them. Let 50 small businesses create 10 jobs each,

and our government says, "So what?"

Until that's corrected...the economy won't be.

From Randy Pennington:

The easy answer is, "Do what we've done in Texas." The leaders here make it easy for business to do business. Here are the results: unemployment lower than the national average; 40% of all the jobs created between 2009 and 2011; large companies relocating here.

The employment statistics don't mention the high percentage of minimum wage jobs, however. Adding jobs is not fixing the economy. For that, we must completely overhaul our education system to grow the skills and work ethic needed to compete in the 21st century.

Here is the truth: Many of the jobs lost in the Great Recession are never coming back. They can be automated or performed in less expensive places. And, we have a skills shortage for the jobs that will grow our economy.

We spend more per student than any other country in the world, and we do not rank in the top 20 on math, science, and reading scores. Our commitment to re-skilling adults is marginal at best – from both the unemployed and the government.

So yes, let's elect grownups who will lead. But let's not confuse putting people to work in low-paying jobs with fixing the economy.

That requires a commitment to education and entrepreneurial thinking that enables jobs that add value. It is equal parts responsible leadership and individual responsibility.

Wait!

The Five Friends Have Video Blogs Too.

Click on the links below to watch the video!

The Five Friends Talk Business:

- [What Is One Mistake Everyone Makes?](#)
- [How To Engage Employees](#)
- [Advice Before Starting Your Own Business](#)
- [One Thing Every Entrepreneur Should Remember](#)
- [Cities We Enjoy](#)
- [Our Worst Speaking Experience Ever](#)
- [Our Favorite Companies](#)
- [One Thing To Improve Your Business](#)

The Five Friends Get Personal:

- [Why We Speak and Write About What We Do](#)
- [What Makes Us Happy?](#)
- [What Is Your Biggest Challenge?](#)
- [How Do You Maintain Work – Life Balance](#)
- [What Ticks Us Off](#)