

# *Businesses* OF ABUNDANCE



*Why and how Big-Hearted Businesses Owners™ can  
create abundance for themselves, their employees, their  
communities, and the world*



**MATT PARDIECK**

BUILD YOUR LION-HEART. BUILD YOUR BUSINESS. BUILD YOUR COMMUNITY.

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# WHY READ THIS ESSAY

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Are you a business owner who cares about current direction of society? Do you want to make a difference AND make your business more profitable? Do you sense that running a business is more than spreadsheets, P&L statements, or typical management techniques? Do you feel led by both purpose and profit but not sure how they relate? Do you wrestle separating out what is true and relevant for you and your business and in an era of hyper media sensationalism? Do you worry how to remain relevant in the era of rapid change from AI?

Then this essay is for you.

This essay is intended to be: practical, grounded in history, grounded in ‘what it means to be human’, and especially relevant in the era of artificial intelligence. This essay is intended as an opening conversation to share practical ideas and inspire your own agency, not a lecture where someone is talking down to you. It’s not feel-good for the sake of feeling good. I hope you will feel I’m a kindred heart hoping to uplift other kindred hearts into meaningful change.

I am someone who’s cheated death multiple times, worked with hundreds of amazing business owners, climbed my own success mountain while choosing the path of greater meaning, and accomplished more in my life than I ever dreamed possible. While being both a man of deep faith/optimism and being grounded to reality with a rocket scientist and business owner’s brain.

Inside you’ll find a prologue, a promise and ten sections in between:

- A conversation I had with Adam Smith and David Hume about AI and modern capitalism
- Why society feels ‘off’ today
- Why closely held businesses are the most trusted institutions left in America and the opportunity ahead
- How/why trust is such a valuable business asset
- Discussion of human nature and how your business culture affects all the important people around you
- How to sensemake in a media-driven world designed to attract your attention and influence your decisions
- Why your heart is your most valuable personal and business asset in the age of AI
- How win-lose can become win-win creating more abundance, without abandoning healthy competition
- An operating system for developing your wisdom, leading to a powerful ‘business of abundance’ flywheel
- Examples of leaders who operate successfully, building abundance for themselves and their ecosystems
- A call to action, one step at a time

I’m just a humble but accomplished man talking to other humble and accomplished owners about something very important and very timely. I hope you join me in this conversation.

- *Matt Pardieck*

# PROLOGUE

## *A Pint with Adam Smith & David Hume*

Talking to so many founders and good people who are concerned about today's state of the world, I've been thinking about what contribution I might be able to make. Several of my friends thought I had something important to say and suggested I write an essay. As I was visiting Edinburgh on vacation during the 250th anniversary of the American Experiment, I contemplated the contributions of the Scottish Enlightenment to our society. David Hume wrote about checks and balances, dangers of political factions, and commerce as a force to soften manners. Adam Smith wrote about economics and the invisible hand, but was equally interested on human motivations of sympathy, conscience, and moral judgement. What would they think of society today? What would they think of my paper?

As I visited Adam Smith's grave hoping for some inspiration, I had a crazy thought. AI is good at synthesizing what someone might say. It's not perfect, but if it has ingested a meaningful portion of someone's writing, it could get in the ballpark. What if I just imagined sitting at a bar and talking to these two gentleman? What follows is the beginning of a two hour conversation.

Sitting down with anyone over a pint—or dinner—it humanizes our conversation. We better feel what someone else is feeling. With heart leading the head we can carry on a conversation, make connections, and learn something meaningful.

After exchanging toasts with my new friends (Slàinte mhath!) to goodwill, the fine city of Edinburgh, and our families, I asked them what they thought about modern society. About the impact of AI on humanity. Was everything as they expected, were their thoughts about the free market and capitalism out of date, or are we starting to lose our way? I shared my ideas on writing a paper and asked their thoughts.

### **Hume, smiling over his pint:**

*"Sir, you are troubled by the abstraction of mankind. And rightly so. Men do not live in abstractions. They live in rooms, across tables, in markets, in families, in habits, in grievances, in affections. If your paper is to persuade, do not merely argue that men should trust. Show them trust. Let them feel the warmth of a human face."*



*The Royal Mile, Edinburgh  
Where the ideas of Smith and Hume were  
born, and where this story began over a pint.*

### Smith, more reserved, but attentive:

*"And remember, sympathy is not sentimentality. It is the faculty by which we enter imaginatively into the situation of another. Commerce works only because we can say, 'What must this other person need? What would be fair? What would make exchange durable rather than predatory?'"*

### You might say:

*"But I fear capitalism has lost its soul."*

### Smith might pause.

*"Capitalism, as you call it, was never meant to possess a soul apart from the people practicing it. Markets do not supply conscience. They require conscience. They economize knowledge, coordinate effort, and reward usefulness. But without moral sentiments, they can become clever machinery in the hands of small souls."*

### Hume would add:

*"Aye. And beware systems that flatter reason while starving sympathy. A man may justify almost anything once his affections are corrupted."*

### You:

*"So can a business owner help repair the world?"*

### Smith:

*"Not by imagining himself a savior. But by governing their commonwealth well. Pay fairly. Deal honestly. Restrain vanity. Build competence. Reward merit. Correct vice without cruelty. Create conditions in which ordinary people may become better than fear would make them."*

### Hume:

*"And do not scold them into virtue. Invite them. Human beings are moved less by syllogism than by example, affection, habit, and honor."*

### You:

*"But how do I write that without making it too soft?"*

### Smith:

*"Make it practical."*

### Hume:

*"And make it human."*

### Smith:

*"Say this: the owner's first task is not to preach abundance, but to create conditions in which trust may safely become rational."*

### Hume, raising his glass:

*"And then tell a story. A true one. The mind may dispute doctrine, but the heart recognizes life."*

Walking back to my flat with my computer from Adam Smith's grave, I realize this AI generated discussion carried much weight to ponder. AI does a remarkable job in capturing ideas and voice as I imagined the conversation near to how it might have transpired. And I worked with AI to learn, explore, and challenge my ideas. AI can magnify humans. But this is *my* writing.

Smith of course published the *Wealth of Nations* 250 years ago in 1776, four months before the Declaration of Independence. The coincidence is remarkable. The founders drew from many traditions—classical philosophy, English common law, the Scottish Enlightenment, and Judeo-Christian ethics—but the conversations taking place in Edinburgh were undeniably among those shaping the intellectual world from which the American republic emerged. Smith was one of the architects of the invisible hand and modern-day capitalism. David Hume was a friend and philosopher, deeply influencing Smith's thinking. Both were fascinated with the relationship between human nature, morals, faith, and the interaction with reason, science and markets. And both were imperfect humans. Hume had painfully racist ideas. Smith criticized for speaking on free markets, then taking a high-paying government customs job. Thankfully, being imperfect doesn't void having some good ideas. Is not grace over our imperfections needed for us to truly know and respect each other?

After writing my own book exploring the relationship of business ownership, wealth, and happiness and being listed as a resource on the Conscious Capitalism website, I've also been thinking deeply about where we are as a society. It surprised me both how the debates of the past remain the debates of the present and how the heart was envisioned as a necessary element in free markets. It seems so many of our problems today could be best addressed by just remembering what we feel deeply inside ourselves to be true.

And their overall thoughts from this discussion? Smith emphasized his earlier book, *Theory of Moral Sentiments* written 17 years earlier, as foundational to his later ideas. In it he explored the importance and sources of 'virtue' in society. Most have forgotten that he believed a culture of virtue was critical to any societal structure, including capitalism. Hume also emphasized his work on human 'sympathy' (what we might now describe as empathy) and its importance to society. They reminded me about what generations before us have known about the state of human nature. How philosophers throughout history have placed virtue and discernment over raw logic and knowledge. That we just need to remember what we already know in our hearts. How human self-interest is also driven by care for others—not being mutually exclusive. How justice and rule of law need to support free markets. How our moral sentiments need to be the masters of our reason, towards which science and technology are directed. And how business owners, grounded in reality within their own ecosystem, are one of the most integral parts of a functioning society and a key to choosing a better direction.

Regarding AI, Smith had discussed how specialization could hurt flourishing if people were doing only repetitive tasks. He was intrigued by AI performing these tasks for humanity allowing people to lean into their own creativity and intuition. Hume suggested reason doesn't tell us what to value, only our moral sentiments can drive what is important. And while we have an exciting new world of technology, what is old about our human nature should be made new again. And it can be practical, fun, inspirational, and profitable.

*"Man naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely." –Adam Smith*

*"No society can surely be flourishing and happy, of which the far greater part of the members are poor and miserable." –Adam Smith*

# PART I. THE STONE IN THE SHOE

## *Why Things Feel Wrong*

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This is what's been troubling me, and maybe you. Right now things don't feel quite right. The impact of the Pandemic. AI. The polarization of politics. Rising global conflicts. Questions as to whether capitalism is benefiting all or only those at the top. There's been a stone in our shoe since the Pandemic and it's keeping us from walking straight. Some friends are posting angry memes vs posting pictures from the cool trips they used to take. They get thousands of views. Family members post about the end of democracy, unless we vote for (fill in blank here). Some employees and customers are a bit on edge, a small bit of friendly decorum has been replaced with cold stares. Pundits share worries of AI killing us all—or bringing in an age of unlimited abundance. We hope things can get better but fear they could get worse. And in 2026 alone, we've seen: war in Iran, war in Ukraine, an attack on Venezuela, an Ebola outbreak, a hantavirus outbreak, and the politics of a mid-term election. Our nervous systems are shot from the media parade of endless trauma.

Yet I'm here to tell you, and I hope by the end of this journey together you'll agree, we can absolutely make things better. There are clear paths, if we only look to see and have the courage to act with big hearts. In simple, beautiful ways more aligned with who we actually are—by remembering what was old made new again. And you... the business owner... are in the best position to lead the way. While helping your business and in ways that are sometimes subtle, yet transformative. I believe we can create a new flywheel, based on bringing more old into the new: an abundance flywheel. One that is grounded in good heart-led

sensemaking, building trust, inspiring agency, growing your people, and along with it building opportunity, community, trust, and abundance.

Who am I? I know my mom's maiden family (the Johnsons) found their way from Aberdeen to the States, the Finch from England. Seems they were peaceful rebels involved with law, business, philanthropy. My great-grandfather was a Trustee of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and Director within international law, recognized as a chief architect of peace during the two world wars. There are rumors



of participation in the Underground Railroad. I feel that pull. I'm someone who's had numerous brushes with death, imprinting upon me the urgency of understanding the things that are most important: martial arts as a young teen under a wise instructor who developed the inside more than the outside; cheating death as a pilot through an engine fire, an engine failure, and a spin; having father nearly pass away due to heart attack in my 20s, leading him to completely re-shuffle his priorities... and as a witness, reshuffling my own priorities choosing a career in Charleston near family versus NYC; losing my youngest sister at young age, yet witnessing her resilience and maintenance of faith and gratitude; recently losing my father many years after his heart attack—and witnessing his humor, bravery, wisdom, and kindness throughout.

I've built an amazing life and business built upon countless acts of kindness for most of the decades I've circled the sun. And watched it come back to me in unexpected ways magnified. I've thought deeply about how and why operating with a big heart seems to produce financial and personal dividends and used a business/analytical mind to figure out if it can be replicated. I believe it can. Yet I am but one of millions of people who see what you see. And feel what you feel. We are the people saving others from the rising waters in Asheville. Teaching your child in Iowa. Defending your freedom overseas or here on your streets. Running your local businesses while remaining integrated and helpful in innumerable ways in your community. We are poor, rich, young, old, any color, any religion, from coast to coast. We are the many, with our own flaws, but still doing acts of good that ripple across the world. We are, somewhere either right on the surface or deep inside—you. And you are not alone. You feel it in your heart. And you are being called.

I believe the ideas in this essay are being used. But I don't believe these ideas are being RECOGNIZED and DEVELOPED, especially through modern media. And I hope to inspire business owners into renewed focus.

*"Where'd all the good people go?" –Jack Johnson*

*"Look for the helpers. You will always find people who are helping." –Fred Rogers*

# PART II. THE MOST TRUSTED INSTITUTION REMAINING IN AMERICA

## *And the Opportunity Ahead*

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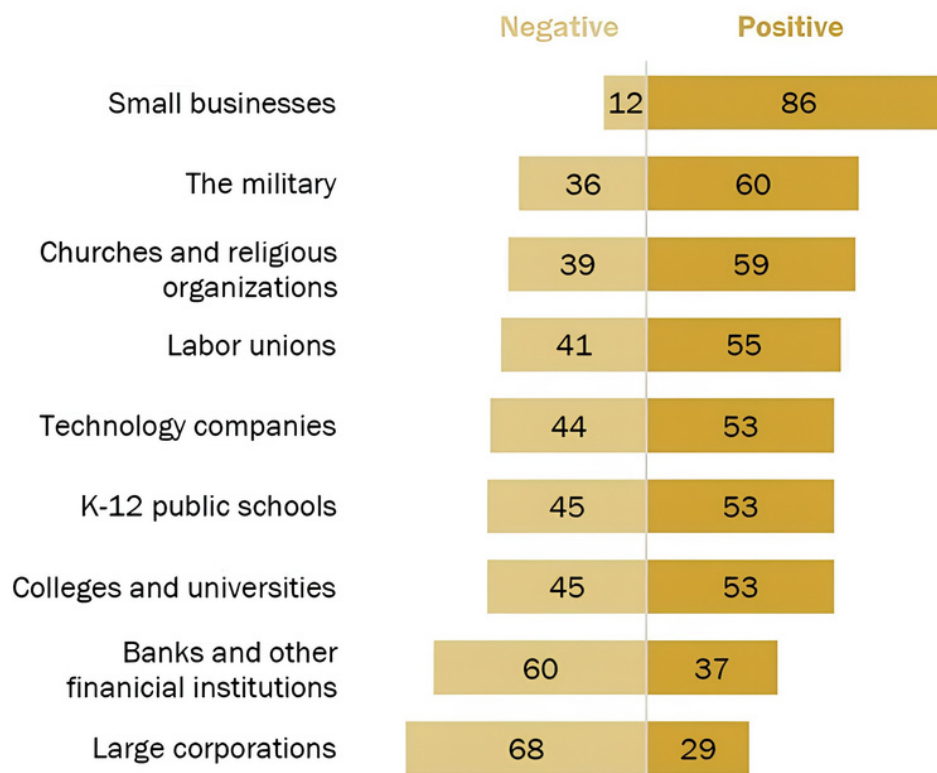
What institution retains the trust of the people? Do you trust what media writes, or do you sense an underlying ‘nudge’ trying to distort your view? Do you trust large tech to have your children’s best interests in mind as they scroll on their phones? Are politicians working towards real solutions, or are they fanning the flames of anger to raise money for their next election... and the one after that? Trust in traditional institutions and halls of power have been shredded. Yet, closely held businesses—you, my good friend—embedded in their community, employing over half of American workers, remain more trusted than any of these other institutions. It is both an awesome responsibility and an awesome opportunity. While we can see the problems, we don’t submit to them—the ripples of actions you take can have massively positive impacts on change.

*Edelman Trust Barometer* (2026 report) has documented the trust society has in its institutions for over 25 years. Not surprisingly, it has documented significant decline in trust in most institutions: government leaders, government departments, NGOs, media, big corporations, academia. Yet this report speaks to the opportunity business owners have in being a ‘trust broker’. I don’t like that term, mainly as I think trust needs to be re-earned vs. leveraged from business owners. But I think business has a huge opportunity as a trust incubator.



## Most Americans say small businesses have a positive impact; large corporations, banks viewed negatively

*% who say each of the following has a \_\_\_\_ effect on the way things are going in the country these days*



Note: No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted Jan. 16-21, 2024.

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Mistrust is not always a bad thing! It is a healthy reaction to a real or perceived wrong and a way to protect ourselves. And through grace, reform, and love trust can be re-earned. Sure, bad actors exist, but sometimes the system we're in can bring out the worst in us even if what is good inside is hidden. Bringing trust back to the surface in others requires brave leadership to chart a different path.

We see this situationally everywhere. Notice how you act in your car after a bad day at the office in heavy traffic and someone blatantly cuts you off causing you to slam on your brakes. Or how you treat someone after another person gave you a compliment on a brand new treasured trinket you're wearing that was a special gift with a special story. We're human. I do my best to treat all with respect and kindness. But corner me and my family threatening bodily harm and if I can't talk my way through it, I'm fiercely bringing my martial arts training. With Quaker blood in my veins, I've wrestled with this paradox. We're all walking paradoxes, situationally evoked. And the car instance happened to my mom recently as I write this paper. She didn't see someone as she pulled into traffic. The man tailgated her, honking and shouting angrily. All the way to the graveyard where she was visiting my dad who was lost recently. She was shaken. What if the man knew he was tailgating a recent widow? Would he have acted differently? Would the situation be different if mom had bumped into him looking distraught on a sidewalk on her way to the grave?

So it becomes all the more important to ask: what is the resting state of the environment where you spend most of your time? It takes awareness and courage to choose to control the environment that controls you. And as an owner, you are creating this environment for your employees... your customers... the vendors who solicit... your suppliers. Of course, it's business. Hard decisions must be made. The nonperforming employee unable/unwilling to improve needs to be let go. You can't give vendors control of your calendar. Balancing these paradoxes is the courageous choice I'm hoping to inspire you to make. And it's good for business.

We have to talk a little about what we're all up against. We are up against people living in their own echo chambers, people relinquishing agency to screen time and the forces of a massive polarization machine that thrives on our anger. I really don't care who started it. I don't necessarily fault the people or the systems as to me it seems a logical progression coming from games of scarcity and de-humanized logic. And the Pandemic accelerated these trends, which all have one thing in common: the separation of us from each other. Separation and lost trust are bad for business.

But business owners are on the ground in our communities. We can't be separate from each other and have any success in our businesses. We're connected to our employees... to our clients... our communities as part of doing business. It's that connection that I believe is the source of the retention of trust businesses maintain. It is a critical element for big-hearted business to consider.

This trust and support of private businesses also extends to academia and government. Local governments want to attract them because they bring jobs and tax revenue, while colleges support them because they employ graduates. Many academic and private studies examine which businesses most benefit communities. The answer isn't surprising: profitable businesses that plan to stay for the long term, retain employees, and create opportunity. Are these businesses more likely to be big-hearted? I believe so. Nobody wants to work for a sweatshop or a jerk boss, especially younger workers who often consider a company's purpose when choosing an employer. People want to feel motivated by their work, and a long-term focus allows businesses to invest in resilience and their people. Aren't these the qualities most business owners aspire to? It's why I believe big-hearted business is one answer to some of our societal problems—not the answer, but one with the potential to influence every community in America.

One of the biggest challenges of all owners, however, is the problem of an owner growing with the growth of his/her business. Business schools have studied this for years, but it boils down to one concept: the problems of larger companies are different than the problems of smaller companies. The owner cannot spread their finite time among a growing number of issues, leading to bottlenecks and/or burnout. The more complex the business, the more an owner has to grow as a person to address these complexities. I hope to provide some resources you as an owner can utilize to grow as a person and a leader to address these issues from a position of credibility. In this matter, it's best for us to stand on the shoulders of giants as these issues have been solved successfully.

# PART III. CHOOSING ABUNDANCE

## *Trust, Credibility, and the Games We Play*

Competition in sports or business is healthy. It makes both the winners and losers better as it provides incentive for the improvement of self. We love the drama of sports. The uncertainty of who will win, the efforts of players putting it all on the line. The “thrill of victory and the agony of defeat”—as the winners realize their dreams after countless hours of practice and the losers go home thinking about what they could have done...switching to something else they do better or improving their game and returning to the arena. Michael Jordan riding the bench at North Carolina. Tom Brady as the 199th NFL draft pick. I believe in the power of having a chip on your shoulder from being overlooked or underrated. I’m just a dumb hick from Summerville, SC—I can don that chip proudly.

But we can take it too far. Most of us have played or watched a sport where one person cheats and it ruins the spirit of fair competition. The cheater destroys trust in them and sometimes trust in the game itself.

My son was a fantastic athlete, playing tennis and soccer in two high-level programs and knowing he would eventually have to choose one or another. I was a tennis player and didn’t understand offsides and the thrill of a 0-0 game, so naturally I was heavily biased towards tennis. At his coach’s suggestion as his fundamentals were sound, we entered him into his first tournament at only 10. We did not discuss the mental game and of course there are no line judges for youth tournaments, relying on each player to fairly call their opponent’s



shots as ‘in’ or ‘out’. After winning his first few matches, he was comfortably ahead in his third match. Then something happened. On match point, his opponent began calling his balls close to the line ‘out’. The match probably should have been over. Matthew complained but soldiered on. A few more questionable calls later, his opponent was back in the match and Matthew began to lose the groove of his shots in frustration. He lost the match. And unfortunately, he lost trust in the game. He then chose soccer, not just because he loved it more, it was his, not mine, and he liked to be able to deliver cosmic justice shoulder to shoulder on the pitch. He had a wonderful career spanning from Academy, overseas, and finally D1. He was usually the smallest kid on pitch, which drove him to be deceptively strong with a healthy chip on his shoulder. Until said shoulders dislocated several times against larger D1 beasts and he could no longer deliver justice. I still feel responsible for the lack of preparation for the tournament, but we’ve had many a conversation since about dealing with the frequent unfairness of life.

Dealing with unfairness is part of life and can't be fully eliminated. We must be able to give others and ourselves grace to release ourselves into moving on and becoming better while advocating for improving the fairness of our games. Even though some believe free market capitalism with its inherent competitiveness has lost some of this trust, we still must recognize the positive impact it has had on elevating society.

Let's take a look back where the human race was 50 years ago, 100 years ago, and 1000 years ago. By pretty much every statistical measure, NOW is the best time to be alive! We could blow ourselves up any moment... but that's been true since the 1960's. Yet somehow, by luck or maybe Divine Grace, we have not. What has led to this rapid improvement in the human condition?

## HISTORICAL HUMAN PROGRESS IN PERSPECTIVE

| TIME PERIOD                                                                                                                | LIFE EXPECTANCY | CHILD MORTALITY<br>(<5 YEARS OLD) | IN POVERTY<br>(< \$2 PER DAY) | IN EXTREME POVERTY<br>(< \$1 PER DAY) |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| <b>~ 1,000 AD Early Medieval World</b><br> | ~25 years       | ~48%                              | ~94%                          | ~84%                                  |
| <b>~ 1925 Early Industrial Era</b><br>    | ~46 years       | ~32%                              | ~63%                          | ~50%                                  |
| <b>~ 1975 Modern Industrial Era</b><br>  | ~63 years       | 13%                               | ~27%                          | ~14%                                  |
| <b>~ 2025 Today</b><br>                  | ~73 years       | ~4%                               | ~9%                           | ~1%                                   |

Sources: World Bank Poverty and Inequality Platform (2026) – processed by Our World in Data; Joe Hasell, Bertha Rohenkohl, Pablo Arriagada, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina, and Max Roser (2022) - “Poverty” Published online at OurWorldinData.org. Retrieved from: <https://ourworldindata.org/poverty>

Note: All figures are approximate and represent global averages. “in poverty” is defined as living on less than \$3/day. “In extreme poverty” is less than \$1/day (2025 PPP). Child mortality is the percentage of children who die before their 5<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Few would argue that it's been a combination of the rule of law and free market capitalism. Based on personal freedoms, ownership rights, allowing individuals to contract amongst themselves... and surrounded by rules of laws to prevent foul play, monopolistic behavior, rent- seeking, or destruction of the commons (environmental). Even with our polarized society, most don't debate the merits. But the concept of “late-stage capitalism”, initially by Karl Marx and sometimes cited today, have pointed out weaknesses in today's society and related them to capitalism. The concentration of wealth in hands of a

select few billionaires. The disparity of income, even if the poor are objectively better off than in the past. The disconnection of large business from local communities. These issues emphasize a disparity between two important capitalistic paths. One is divorced from what it means to be human: more for the sake of more; efficiency over humanity; multiple expansion over community... another path combines the heart with the business: being a steward of not only profits, but of your entire ecosystem—employees and community. I hope to share with you selfish reasons to choose the latter path. And yes, I believe it rewards the self in innumerable ways to focus on stewardship.

Our founders spoke of unalienable rights: life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. They did not promise equal outcomes, but they believed that a free people, governed by laws and virtue, could pursue flourishing. Two hundred and fifty years later, that experiment remains unfinished.

It's a dog-eat-dog world, but can't we all just get along?? Herein lies a seemingly impossible paradox. You have only one job opening, all the other candidates you don't hire will be disappointed. You lose out on a contract. You have to fire an employee. Business is full of games of scarcity, which will always remain. But: telling the closest candidates about their positive traits might have them apply during the next round of hiring. Improving your bidding process as a result of your loss makes next bid more likely to land. Doing an exit interview could give an employee hope for another path. Even if not all can be changed, these are ways a game of scarcity can turn into abundance. But there's more to it, to understand let's do a quick review of a little game theory to emphasize the importance of trust for a business owner.

The *Prisoner's Dilemma* is a classic game demonstrating the difference trust can have in a game. In this game, there are two prisoners arrested for a crime. The officers will interrogate both in hopes of getting one to rat out the other. If one rats and the other does not, that prisoner gets one year while the other gets 3 years in prison. If they both rat, they both get 2 years in prison. If neither rats, they both go free. If the prisoners don't trust each other, the equilibrium is both of them ratting out the other. If they do trust each other, they are both likely to go free. Trust changes the game. Trust changes all the games. Similarly, a game without trust will be a game of scarcity with a lower sum to society. A game of trust will create additional abundance to the business and society. Trust encourages employees, customers, and suppliers to be more loyal. It enhances your ecosystem.

Steven Covey wrote a fantastic book called *The Speed of Trust*, bringing what we know inside ourselves into a systematic practice. The overall premise is that when trust is present, everything moves faster and more efficiently. But trust is something that must be earned through repeated practices, behaviors, competence, and ultimately character. He called this combination of competence and character—credibility. THIS is the second path and one many business owners already follow, including not just competence and cold efficiency, but combining it with character.

I'm an engineer not a philosopher, but this is the re-discovery/re-dedication to timeless principles that are more inherent to what is inside of us. And have been for millennia. Aristotle called it virtue. Plato, an ordered soul. Confucius right relationships. Even the atheistic/intensely logical Hume called it sympathy. Smith, moral sentiment. As it was more important in his mind for the thriving of free markets. But it can't be legislated. We need to grow it within ourselves and use it to inspire others. We can't scale it from systems that have lost so much of this trust, we must scale it through bottom-up societal inspiration. So more everywhere can remember what we need as humans to flourish. So how do we put this into business practice? Inner work. Good sensemaking and orientation to recognize the closest version of reality. Retaining agency, hope, and rational optimism. Copying what others have done successfully to build enduring, profitable, and inspirational businesses that attract the best people and clients. And impact society one business at a time.

# PART IV. SELF-DEVELOPMENT AND THEORIES OF HUMAN GOODNESS

## *Why Human and Business Flourishing Requires Growth, Agency and Character*

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*"I Believe Most People are Good." –Luke Bryan*

*"The line separating good and evil passes... right through every human heart." –Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn*

Some would say that people can't be trusted to make decisions for themselves. That people are too selfish or too stupid to be left on their own. That the agency of decision making should be decided by those with more experience, credentials, and intelligence. That AI can be used to outsource judgment and independent thought. That we need to have laws and control systems to enforce people into goodness. That the stakes are too high for humanity's fate to be left to chance. That, if there's a God, he's silent and has no say or influence within earthly affairs.

Allow me to share some philosophical and logical reasons along with examples of why I believe those people are misreading the nature of humanity. And how we can develop as leaders to empower others into their own best version of themselves.

### HUMAN NATURE AND MORAL ENVIRONMENT

Humans are complicated creatures. We've been studying our human nature for centuries and philosophers are not in full agreement on how to predict what happens within this human operating system. A person in one situation can be the nicest person in the world, but when placed under stress in different circumstances, can do horrible things to other people.

In a Leadership Charleston class many years ago that helped members better understand different aspects of our community, we visited a maximum-security prison called Lieber Correctional Institution. Murderers, rapists, drug dealers. It was both intended as 'scared straight' and to give us a better understanding of the criminal justice system. One part of it was hearing the stories of four inmates.

I can't remember all the stories, but one in particular struck me. It was an African American man convicted for larceny, possession and accessory to murder. When younger, he performed very well in school but dropped out of college after being addicted to drugs. He and a friend who had a gun decided to rob a gas station. The cashier resisted and lost his life to his friend and he became an accessory. He fully acknowledged his poor decisions leading to his conviction. Now he helps other inmates learn to read and hosts Bible studies inside the prison. While we had been actively talking on the ride to the prison, our ride home was in complete silence. We saw the faces of others behind bars and witnessed their humanity. All of us were pondering one scary thought: if we were in their shoes, how or if would we have done things differently?

René Girard is a philosopher who talked about how people tend to mimic each other, frequently following the crowd. The behavior of crowds is a study all in and of itself. And I think memetics are a good explanation for how we can be so stupid when on social media, yet social when meeting people over dinner. But I would argue that when we are in our most unguarded state with other people, in small interpersonal settings, our true nature is more likely to show up.

This inmate at Lieber showed both darkness and light. We all hold darkness and light, situationally evoked. But what is our natural state and do we have both the agency and character to help improve the natural state of those around us? Are we inherently good or bad? I think it's actually a very important question as it certainly affects how we manage others and operate as a society. I've already revealed my opinion but thought I'd make my case by asking you some questions to consider and then referring to some dead smart guys' ideas.

Studies have analyzed the behavior of young children in how they interact trying to reveal our natural disposition. With exceptions, kids seem to understand fairness extremely early... and are more likely to cooperate than compete. From where did this originate? Is it related to an almost universal sense of helping and community after shared disasters everywhere in the world?

Turns out philosophers have been debating our inherent virtue for thousands of years. Of course, just like economists, there is no universal agreement since it's ultimately impossible to find the conclusive truth of our nature. We have to look within ourselves. But some of the most respected philosophers agree on some level of inherent goodness: Aristotle, Socrates, Plato, Confucius and even Smith relied upon this virtue for functioning markets. Others weren't so sure or even skeptical about goodness with human character: Hume, Hobbes, Machiavelli and Nietzsche. It's over my pay grade to argue the nuances of their philosophies, but clearly, the latter philosophers would argue people cannot be TRUSTED. And thus, systems should be in place to force trust upon us. I don't believe that is consistent with our human nature and will do more harm than good to human flourishing, so I'll share more.

All philosophers agree on one thing: that virtue is needed for society to function. And they would mostly agree on what defines virtue even if the sources of this virtue trigger some debate. These are also remarkably consistent within all the major religions. So there must be something to this virtue thing! These can be distilled into four major traits:

- **Wisdom**—the ability to see clearly (sensemaking as discussed before) and discern with both intellect and heart.
- **Courage**—the ability to pursue what you believe to be right in spite of risk.
- **Temperance**—the ability to control and manage your own most primal impulses.
- **Love**—being in touch with gratitude and treating others fairly with empathy, grace, and goodwill.

What do all of these have in common? Heart. Heart guides in dispensing wisdom. Heart is required for courage. Heart can overrule our most base impulses. And of course, heart is frequently interchangeable with love.

And I believe heart is part of how we are made. How do you feel when you help someone or give someone a gift? Why does our body create endorphins to make us feel good as we help others? And cortisol as we argue and fight? How do we feel during and after we make love to someone we care about? And as a Christian, Jew or Muslim... if we are made in God's image, would He not instill these virtues... even if free will allows us to choose not to follow them?

Is not happiness a fully heart-felt life? Can you feel unhappy when your heart is full? When beauty fills your soul?

## THE HEART OF THE MATTER

The beating heartbeat of this paper is the power of the heart and is irreplaceable by AI. The importance of the heart. The wisdom of the heart. The power of the heart. The heart as truest to our nature. The heart as the best way to develop people into the best version of ourselves. The heart as the ultimate destination for humanity's perfection. The heart as central architecture for any systems for where humans will thrive. In business, society, politics, news, technology, art, culture... if any of these things do not have heart, they will not contain beauty. They won't contain what we know in ourselves as necessary for our humanness.



You know this to be true. When you see something beautiful, where does it touch you... in your head? Do you intellectualize the beauty of a song or a painting? A sunset? You know it immediately and feel it deep inside yourself. How can it not also be true in business? Doesn't it drive excellence in product design or service? Doesn't it drive how you treat employees and how they return the sentiment? Isn't it similar with customers, vendors, suppliers and the community where you serve?

And the heart is the basis for all that was previously described as virtue. Courage (the Wizard of Oz's Lion knew it was the HEART that he needed), empathy, gratitude, grace, goodwill... all leading to trustworthiness! The glue of society is held together by the trust earned by people who have heart! Should that not be why we need more big-hearted business? If you need more convincing, following is significant business evidence that creating an environment of trust—both in being trustworthy, but also trusting in people—creates more profitable, enduring and fun business.

## THE PROBLEM OF LIMITED PERSPECTIVE

We live in a world awash in data. But how much do we really know? Is data collected by an observation from one of your employees about an eye roll from a customer about a new product? Or of the thousands of conversations that occur regularly between employees and customers? Each person has their own observations, biases and opinions. And each person takes small actions reflecting these preferences.

I love flying. Mankind has looked to the skies for millennia and now we have the privilege of taking to the clouds almost on a whim! As a pilot, the thrill of “slipping the surly bonds of earth” has inspired me since first sitting in a cockpit. You can dance among the clouds, seeing them up close, and flying through these large marshmallows. And the view of looking at the earth from above gives you a completely different perspective. You notice things you never noticed before. The beautiful home hiding in the middle of a forest. The way farmland makes beautiful checkered patterns from the sky. The way skyscrapers shrink in comparison to the majesty of a mountain range or canyon. And the higher you climb, the more everything becomes interdependent. It’s why astronauts marvel at the pettiness of wars when viewing the blue marble from the far side of the moon. Different perspectives give you a better view of the reality of your situation. Similarly as different people with diverse backgrounds have their own unique view.

Such is the basis of Smith’s Invisible Hand theory. It is the collective decisions of millions of people with their unique observations that translate into critical information about the true value of something. Even today, the knowledge of machines, video, or other sensors pales in comparison to the observations of humans. This is why many philosophers have put so much faith in decentralized wisdom (Smith, Hayek, Tocqueville, von Mises) and why centralized control too removed from reality, nearly always fails in its goals. It is the most commonly cited reason the Soviet Union collapsed. A business owner within a high-trust ecosystem doesn’t have one set of eyes... he/she has the eyes of everyone in the ecosystem.

## MOST PEOPLE ARE MORE CAPABLE THAN WE THINK

In the mid 1980s, a near bankrupt business named Springfield Remanufacturing Corporation (SRC) began an interesting experiment with a new style of leadership. How would employees respond if: they were given skin in the game, information to make meaningful decisions on their own, and trust/support to pursue ideas aligned with business goals. It challenged several prevailing theories: the more active the management of employees the more productive they become; most employees without prior training are incapable of learning complex business ideas; sharing internal business metrics does more harm than good; and giving away ownership subtracts from the founder’s business value. Each of these ideas was disproven within the unique SRC ecosystem and a new and fascinating business movement developed: The Great Game of Business.

After noticing line workers without college degrees could quote complicated statistics from their favorite baseball teams, SRC turned the reading of financials into a ‘game’. They gave them a stake in the outcome via an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP). They helped them make a connection between their job or department and the price of their stock. They gave them freedom support to innovate new ideas, including ownership in new related entities. Then they watched. The business grew exponentially, paid off its significant debt, and created wealth for thousands of new owners—including the new management team, led by Jack Stack. Dozens of new companies formed. Thousands of workers employed and built wealth.

One such example was a new subsidiary under SRC called NewStream Enterprises. Employees noticed that SRC was throwing away large quantities of reusable packaging and materials. Rather than suggesting cost savings, they suggested a standalone business that specialized in packaging, recycling, logistics, and supply-chain services. NewStream is now enjoying 36 years in business. From their website: “... our 36-year legacy is built on trust, quality, and customer success.”



The Great Game of Business became a training ground and ecosystem for businesses looking to follow a similar approach. Additional related companies were formed such as Small Giants and Tugboat Institute that followed some of these ideas, helping businesses thrive with similar mindsets. Even KKR, under Managing Director Pete Stavros (also founder of nonprofit Ownership Works), has been focused on employee ownership in some of its new acquisition strategies with great success. With one important addition: confirming the ability of the management team to have empathy. Because this approach doesn't work when the owners don't have a combination of intelligence AND heart. Nor does it work without some structure and balance. Because we humans are still imperfect and a mixture of good and bad.

Many examples of this approach working can be found: WL Gore & Associates, Ingersoll Rand, Nucor, Semco, Toyota, John Lewis Partnership. And many counter examples can be found where lack of structure created problems: Valve, Zappos, and some worker cooperatives.

A great friend and college roommate actually wrote about this balance in his doctoral thesis: *Employees and Entrepreneurship: Co-ordination and Spontaneity in Non-Hierarchical Business Organizations*. Ivan Pongracic is an Economics professor at Hillsdale College whose book explored the middle ground between empowering employees while providing structure to avoid chaos.

When people are given agency, information, capability and stake in outcome, they often far exceed expectations. But only when business retain some structure and the owner has developed their heart.

## THE PROBLEM AND OPPORTUNITY OF BUSINESS SCALE

Countless consultants and MBA programs discuss the problem of "Founder's Syndrome", where a business outgrows the leadership of the founder. At the beginning, a founder is able to make most decisions for the organization. As it grows and the number of decisions needed increases, the founder becomes a bottleneck to decision making, which stifles continued growth. In addition to the sheer number of decisions, the complexity of decision making also grows. This can create a capability bottleneck at the founder level if their leadership style doesn't develop. Finally, as wealth accumulates, the power, control and influence of the founder can begin to corrupt their thinking.

As so many other management books and programs talk about the structural ways to survive Founder's Syndrome, I want to instead talk about the heart-centered ways to survive and thrive. But first, we must acknowledge something that can make Founder's system worse so we can navigate through with clear eyes.

Lord Acton said, "Power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely." The Bible says, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." 1 Timothy 6:10.

Philosophers have discussed the ways in which power or significant wealth has changed the trajectory of growth of us imperfect humans. Families of significant wealth worry greatly about the positive or negative impact their wealth has on successive generations. Yet many, from Aristotle, Seneca, Tocqueville, and even St Thomas Aquinas focus more on how wealth magnifies what's already inside of us. I also believe this is true as you have both good and bad stewards of wealth or power. If this is true, then it is even more important for business owners, as stewards of potentially great wealth, to develop themselves and their character. Not only so they can have the wisdom to understand and find solutions for more complex problems, but so they can resist the urge great wealth can pull into the darker side of our nature.

The book I wrote in 2022, *The Bottom Line of Happiness*, explores the 'how' an owner with a big heart can steward their wealth in ways that provide meaning, purpose and fulfillment. In the next few sections of this paper, I hope to show some of the ways and resources to develop wisdom, heart and the increased capacity for a life of powerful meaning. Steven Wilkinson with Good & Prosper and a co-founder of Small Giants said, "if we don't act as stewards over our ecosystem, others will do it for us." With all the issues in today's world, we can't do NOTHING and hope things get better on their own. It begins with sensemaking.

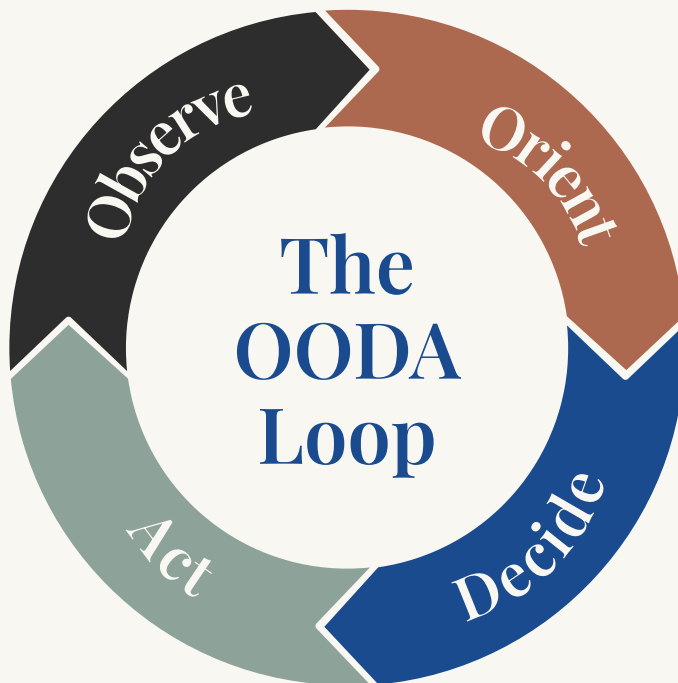
# PART V. SEEING CLEARLY

## *Sensemaking in a Distorted World: Why Modern Systems Pull Us Toward Scarcity and How to Resist*

In many ways, leading a business is similar to how a general needs to lead troops on the battlefield. Except, of course, the goals are way different: providing a good or service in a voluntary transaction vs killing people. But similar in that generals and business owners can't be fooled by false realities as they have skin in the game for potential loss. One makes you lose customers or employees. Another loses lives. This comes down to a critically important concept, one that nearly all successful businesses know consciously or subconsciously: sensemaking.

John Boyd was a famous military strategist who transformed modern warfare through a concept called an OODA loop. Observe, orient, decide and act. Much of this was based on Sun Tzu's *Art of War*. The theory is that having a faster ability to observe and orient than the enemy is key to winning in warfare. You see this in martial arts as well—the punch you don't see coming is usually the one that hurts the most. Sensemaking.

His framework—observe, orient, decide, act—is a powerful model for leaders navigating uncertainty.



In today's world of rapid technological, social, and economic change, the ability to continuously cycle through OODA—faster than others—creates a decisive advantage.

Nicholas Taleb has a character in several of his books named “Fat Tony.” If you’ve worked in business, you’ve seen Tony somewhere. No college degree, but he can smell bullshit 1000 miles away and is quick to act in ways to avoid it. This is sensemaking. Taleb I believe has some very good points in his books *Antifragile* and *Skin in the Game*. That those with skin in the game are more likely to be closer to the truth. When actions are divorced from consequence, the need to adhere to reality dissipates. Perhaps this is a source of the reduced trust with some of our institutions.

Unfortunately, sensemaking in our current environment is harder than ever due to the overwhelming number of public narratives looking to nudge us into something. Heck, I’m trying to nudge you into something! It’s more important than ever for us as business owners to try and filter through the noise. Consider how politics have evolved.

Politics is a pure competition game. One winner, one loser with the winner writing the story. This isn’t new as political actors have played bare-knuckle politics for generations. Even in the relatively short history of the US, Hamilton, Jefferson, Burr, and Adams threw some real zingers around in the early days of the Republic: “(Hamilton is) a bastard brat of a Scotch peddler...” –Adams; Federalists said that if Jefferson was elected, the country would devolve to “murder, robbery, rape, adultery, and incest...”; and of course, Burr famously killed Hamilton in a duel turning rhetoric into violence. The words haven’t really changed that much. But money, social media and the ability of AI to scale messaging has amplified this rhetoric such that it dominates our political landscape today. It has unfortunately brought so many into the cacophony of noise and in many cases drowned out normal discourse. It’s an unholy flywheel. Anger leads to raising money, money buys angry ads, more money on other side is raised, more money buys angry ads... and the money/amplification cycle continues. It is little wonder that by every measure, money in politics is exponentially higher than in the past. Anger feeds the political money machine. I think there are ways to change this game, but at a minimum, it makes it far more difficult to separate noise from signal for a business owner. This makes sensemaking today more important than ever.

## SOCIAL MEDIA AS SENSE-LOSING TOOL

OK, we all know this to be true but can’t resist. The allure of likes, views, and reposts feeds our craving for recognition. And in business, a popular website, Facebook page or Instagram site can be another tool to gain and maintain customers or a monetizable audience. But. Of course it’s not exactly reality. The internal algorithms feed any form of engagement, and unfortunately, enRAGEment is the most reliable method. And while your business may be promoting its own identity, many feel a sense of anonymity hiding behind a screen even with their names on full display. Similar to hiding behind the windshield on a car.

How much easier is it to act like a jerk when driving in traffic than sitting at a bar next to someone at a restaurant? Same people, different reactions. And how most people are on social media is not how most people are in real life. The more we click on parallel themes or ideas, the more the algorithm will feed us more of the same. Or even worse, bad online actors and political operatives pay to nudge us into the enagement game. Giving us positive reinforcement for the likes calcifying our bubble. Can someone’s agency overcome the algos and the nudge of enagement?

Many would say ‘no’—people are too gullible and have no interest in being rescued from what some may call a bubble, but they view as their own current reality. True for some. But we are social creatures influenced more so by human connection than by screens and algorithms. Thus I believe a leader who stays grounded to reality can inspire the people around them. Not telling them what to do or think, but inspiring them by example and turning people towards human connection.

## PRACTICAL SENSEMAKING: LEFT BRAIN, RIGHT BRAIN, SOURCES, INCENTIVES, EXPERIMENTS

### WAYS OF SENSEMAKING—LEFT AND RIGHT BRAINS

I'm going to brag a little bit. Having an aeronautical engineering degree, having worked 30 years in finance, and spending a lifetime trying to “love my neighbor”, I feel like I've developed a very special sensemaking ability that combines a shortened scientific method, a Bayesian brain, understanding how incentives shape outcomes, recognizing mental ‘illusions’, and knowing when to incorporate heart, gut and intuition. Doesn't make me at all infallible, but I have much skin in the game making fiduciary decisions for my own and others' money, running a business, and trying to take care of the people I love. I have scars. Hopefully some of how I think you'll find useful as I believe it can help in both business and life. And you'll see later, the superpower is not outsized intelligence (I mean, I wasn't even a good engineer), it's in the use of heart within sensemaking... bringing old into new.

### FIND GOOD SOURCES

I've found most of my reliable sources by talking to people within my industry and finding who they trust for information. It has taken many years to curate the list of resources that flash across my screens but I am always willing to share these sources with others. I believe most people are similarly inclined because the source of information is only part of the puzzle—discernment is internal and harder to replicate.

Personally, most traditional media outlets have little value to me as unfortunately many of them are trying to nudge me into thinking a certain way. I still do read the Wall Street Journal and my local newspaper. I will sometimes use some aggregator services such as Ground News or All Sides as they do a great job of sharing the bias of news sources and include opposing views on same topic so I can make up my own mind. Yes, make up YOUR own mind.

This isn't as tedious as it sounds, most business owners are a curious lot and being informed is the first important part of your business OODA loop.

### EVALUATE LOGICALLY WHILE CHALLENGING YOUR OWN ASSUMPTIONS

It's difficult to find truly perfect information. The information may have lost signal coming through an intermediary source. There might be bias from the news source framing it in a certain way, omitting some information, amplifying other parts of the information. We have our own biases and filters potentially distorting what we read/hear. The next step is trying to evaluate the imperfect information you received into an opinion you can test.

I do my best to try and internally weight probabilities of truth based upon the underlying incentives and how much it seems like opinion versus stated fact. Some call this a Bayesian brain approach after Thomas Bayes, who published in the 1760s on probability theories. It's similar to playing poker: you read the table, consider what's in your hand, consider what others might have, then make a probabilistic guess on the best bet.

Essential to this way of thinking is to be able to hold two thoughts in your head at the same time. This takes a little bit of empathy to see and understand another viewpoint, but it frequently reveals an even deeper truth. For an example, consider these two truths related to this paper: “people are fundamentally self-interested” and “people are social creatures.” The first to an extreme would mean people will always act in ways that help themselves, even sometimes at the expense of others. The second that we would act in sacrifice for others. A deeper truth is that we are both and what actions we take will be affected by circumstance. Another is that being a social creature can also be selfish—a feeling of belonging, rewards in faith, and that unmistakable dopamine rush when someone genuinely appreciates your kind gesture. “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.” – F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Charlie Munger famously said, “Show me the incentives and I’ll show you the outcome.” So much incredible wisdom from this one line. It simplifies game theory. It can help with crafting incentive structures for employees. It can reveal what a ‘system’ is trying to accomplish. It can allow you to handicap a claim made by a salesman or other promoter.

This might be the most tedious part of sensemaking, but on important decisions, I find it very helpful to check the original source if possible. It’s very easy for news sources to take comments out of context. We also use our bodies, facial expressions, voice intonation and hands to communicate. Some would say this is 90% of communication and a reason I believe 1-1 conversations are so much more valuable. I have found it so useful during financial crisis or important political events—body language can reveal clues no quote could ever transmit. A fantastic book on the topic, *What Every Body is Saying* by former FBI agent Joe Navarro. I think it’s also a good clue on how to tell AI from real, as of now we can still see when an AI image is a little too perfect to be human.

Finally, below are a collection of mental hacks many have used (including from Dan Kahneman’s *Thinking Fast & Slow*, Charlie Munger writings, Taleb, Marks)

**Occam’s Razor** The most likely explanation is probably the right one

**Hanlon’s Razor** Don’t attribute to malice what can be explained by inattention

**Hitchens’s Razor** A claim without evidence can be dismissed without evidence

**Inversion** Ask the inverse question (How do I succeed? How do I fail?)

**Second-level (Chess) Thinking** After next thing happens, what’s after that?

**Correlation is Not Causation (and related)** Do not attribute meaning to what might have been only random.

## TEST IMPORTANT IDEAS WITH SMALL EXPERIMENTS

One of the core messages from Taleb’s *Antifragile* is that an antifragile system is more immune to failure as it has multiple small failure points versus one huge failure point. This is a great concept for both businesses and life. A business that’s highly leveraged with concentration in a few customers is extremely vulnerable to a single failure point bankrupting the business. A nonleveraged business with many clients can much more easily survive a loss of a few clients.

Fully relying on one idea that you never challenge can also make your sensemaking fragile. Performing small experiments on ideas by considering opposing views and playing out the argument in your mind will help solidify your thinking.

## HACKING SOCIAL MEDIA

The best hack is simply one-on-one conversations. Not emails. Not group meetings where one person does all the talking. Many studies have shown that employee engagement, turnover and productivity are best influenced by a leader who interacts 1-to-1 to their people, here’s but one of them from **Gallup**. An organization that has a culture of people talking to each other performs better. And the owners become more connected to what is happening at the ground level of their company. 1-1 review meetings are but one potential way to facilitate, but I’ve seen many others depending on the type of business. Another easy one to add are social or dinner functions, which are wonderful ways for employees to get to know each other.

Another way to hack your own personal social media feed is to be mindful about purposes of your feed to then take control of the algo. I’ll discuss more later, but we humans have agency over where we spend our attention. Our attention is the hottest commodity in media, but ultimately we choose where to spend it. Using heart-led sensemaking that aligns our attention with what is important to us versus the algorithm is a super-hack. While not foolproof as ads will still find you, I personally love this approach as

I still want to maintain a connection to friends or loved ones who are far away without seeing the political rants. I remain mindful of resisting anything that smells of rage, I'll 'like' as many family related pictures as I can see in a sitting, and I'll actively delete or ask the algo to suppress ads I find more offensive. It takes a bit of discipline, but in a short amount of time you'll notice that social media can actually once again become—social! People who know me will also not be surprised that I have many inspirational feeds appear as I'll 'like' what seems encouraging or inspirational. That's the kind of bubble I can survive in, even if YES... it can still be a bubble requiring other sources of grounded information.

We cannot heal polarization through reciprocal hatred. We cannot restore trust through permanent outrage. We cannot defeat manipulation through counter-manipulation without becoming what we claim to oppose. But we can choose a different path that inspires our people and creates abundance for our business.

*"We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies. Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched as surely they will be by the better angels of our nature." –Abraham Lincoln*

We need heart as an integral part of sensemaking.

# PART VI. HEART AS A WAY OF KNOWING

## *Bringing Heart Into Sensemaking*

This is the secret sauce. You are the master of your business dominion and are called to decisions that affect your bottom line and the lives of those around you. Making decisions based upon pure logic alone ignores the critical human element. Bringing heart into sensemaking builds the trust element of credibility. It encourages workers to operate with less supervision. It aligns your people with mission. It gives you more grace when you inevitably screw up. It can change games of scarcity into games of abundance. And it has been the magical combination of leaders for millennia. Never to be outsourced to AI. AI is fundamentally retrospective. AI learns patterns from what already exists, trying to find the most likely middle. Humans remain uniquely capable of imagination, inspiration, and into new possibilities from their irreplaceable heart.

*“Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart....”  
–King Solomon (1 Kings 3:9)*

*“Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.” –Proverbs 4:23*

I’m not asking you to consider and solve all of your employees or vendors’ personal problems. I AM asking you to know your people and view them with empathy. I AM asking you to hold in your head these thoughts as you make

difficult decisions. Even if those decisions by necessity may hurt them personally through such things as layoffs. How to sensemake with heart?

Listen to your people. Truly listen. I had mentioned the importance of 1-1 and how body language can give you further bits of information you may need to better understand your business in their world. See every employee not only as a person on your team, a supplier, a customer... but see them also as fully human, trying to make it in this world just like everyone else.

Listen to your intuition/gut, similar to Fat Tony. Kahneman calls this “thinking fast” as opposed to deliberating and “thinking slow.” Malcolm Gladwell in his book *Blink* called it “thin slicing.” In theory this is a built skill from years of experience allowing someone to quickly evaluate a situation with an unconscious competence showing up in your gut.



Listen to your heart. When I feel something is truly right, I can feel my heart open up feeling warm and strong. It is a belief in a person, an idea, or even a strategy that feels especially highlighted as something to explore more fully. It is related to but different from my gut, but more thinking and discernment is necessary to understand why something is highlighted.

Listen to “God winks”. I believe another important signal is paying attention to synchronicities, or what I call ‘God winks.’ These are coincidences that your mind is underlining for you to spend a moment or two to understand why. It might be a divine force pulling you in an important direction. It might be the future pulling you forward. Or it might just be your mind recognizing a pattern that’s important to you. Albert Einstein attributed much of his success to following his curiosity, which can lead us to deeply inspired new thoughts.

*“Have the courage to follow your heart and intuition. They somehow already know what you truly want to become.” –Steve Jobs*

# PART VII. CHARACTER, TRUST, AND WIN-WIN-NO DEAL

## *Character and Trust Changes Scarcity Into Abundance*

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In Stephen Covey's transformative book (40 million+ books sold), *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, one of his chapters is titled "Think Win-Win". The simple concept is to try to pursue relationships and agreements in ways that are mutually beneficial. Similarly, Adam Smith said, "Healthy markets emerge when self-interest is pursued within a framework of trust, justice, and mutual benefit." This does not mean a negotiation should ignore your own self-interest. Nor does it mean that valuable negotiation tactics should be ignored either. But it does mean that a desire for a deal that results in mutual benefit derives from and creates more trust. It makes it more likely that you will do another deal rather than angering someone into never working with you again. Or vice versa.

The necessary element of this mutually beneficial transaction is trust. Both parties should have trust in good faith. And of course, good faith comes from character and the quality of your product. Coaching guru Brian Whetten expands upon this concept by suggesting, when possible, that business owners seek win-win or no deal at all. In so doing, you curate an ecosystem of trust surrounding you by slowly dealing more with those of character and less with those you do not trust.

Of course, product-related transactions don't necessarily have a human element in the transaction. But the quality of the product will also help build mutual trust. One of the most obvious examples of this win-win into abundance mentality is with your employees. Studies have shown that happy employees who feel shared purpose, being valued, and being fairly compensated perform better for their employers.

It is these growing ecosystems built on trust and character that I believe can have such a large societal impact. While growing your business. But it is not at all easy! So how do we develop our characters so these ideas become ingrained and part of our daily way of conducting ourselves and operating our businesses?

# PART VIII. THE BIG-HEARTED BUSINESS OWNER OPERATING SYSTEM

I've built up to an incredibly important chapter, how to build your wisdom and heart for balanced use with your intellect in life and business. And the truth of course is that this is a lifelong endeavor that is somewhat different for everyone. But I believe there are common elements in most cultures and religions as the human operating system has been similar for millennia. I'm hopeful to share inspiration and resources so that you can continue to explore an exciting lifelong journey through people and approaches that most resonate with you.

I've practiced all of these concepts and practices and have seen them work in embodied practice. I'm certainly not perfect and frequently try to do too much, but I look at least a decade younger than I am, I have an amazing life filled with love and wonderful people, I have a thriving business, and I feel the warmth of love reflected back to me every day. I hope the same for everyone.

## ASPIRATIONAL CONCEPTS

### LOVE GOD, LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR

For those who wanted the CliffsNotes of the New Testament, Jesus shared in Matthew 22 to Love God and Love thy neighbor as thyself. “On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.” Loving neighbor as thyself comes from Old Testament in Leviticus. This preaches a vertical love to the sacred and a horizontal love to your fellow human. I am a Christian. But it's fascinating to me that most other religions have within their sacred texts similar sentiment:

|              |                   |                        |                                                                        |
|--------------|-------------------|------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Christianity | Gospel of Matthew | Matthew 22:37–39       | Love God with all your being; love your neighbor as yourself.          |
| Judaism      | Leviticus         | Leviticus 19:18        | Love your neighbor as yourself.                                        |
| Islam        | Qur'an            | Qur'an 4:36            | Worship God alone and be good to family, neighbors, and those in need. |
| Hinduism     | Mahabharata       | Anushasana Parva 113:8 | Do not do to others what would be harmful if done to you.              |
| Buddhism     | Udana-Varga       | Udana-Varga 5:18       | Do not harm others in ways you yourself would find harmful.            |

I also believe these sentiments are the basis for everything else in this chapter. If you brush decision-making against these concepts, the rest falls into place.

## THE POWER OF USING YOUR ENTIRE BRAIN

“*The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind is a faithful servant.*” –Albert Einstein

I’m a rocket scientist, but I’m nowhere near as smart as Einstein. He figured out, as have so many other transformational thinkers, that BOTH parts of the brain are critically important for high performing leaders. Yet, society and business have focused dramatically more attention to the development of the left side of the brain. What are the two sides and how are they different?

You undoubtedly read about the differences between the thinking of the left and right hemispheres of our brains. (A fantastic 5 minute summary of the differences and why both are important is found here from a friend, Tom Morgan during a Sohm Institute [presentation](#)) How the left brain is logical, methodical, calculating and strategic. And how the right brain is spiritual, interconnected, loving and full of feelings. The left side of the brain is very easy to measure development. Academia has been fantastic about imparting knowledge and subsequently testing the retention of that knowledge. But if it has been important to great thinkers and philosophers, how do you develop and measure the use of the right brain? And why? What is the right balance between the two?

Similar to the Einstein quote, Ian McGilchrist (psychiatrist and neuroscience researcher) wrote a relatively recent book on the topic called *The Master and Its Emissary*. As a business owner, you may not have time to read a 600-page book. But he argues that the right side of the brain should be given control of the wheel since it understands purpose and meaning versus just metrics and formulas. Indeed,

### A left-hemisphere-led business sees:

- Employees as resources
- Customers as transactions
- Communities as markets
- Nature as inputs

### A right-hemisphere-led business sees:

- Employees as people
- Customers as relationships
- Communities as ecosystems
- Nature as stewardship

The first can generate profit.

The second can generate profit and trust.

So my ask is that you consider the right side as important to be developed more fully. What is the basis of your right hemisphere? Heart.

## A BIG HEART IS A PRACTICAL ASSET TO BE DEVELOPED

“*Reason is, and ought only to be the slave of the passions.*” –David Hume

Love and heart are valuable business assets, not just right brained emotions to be managed.

How do you measure the ‘goodwill’ on the balance sheet of a business? In accounting terms, it’s simply business value minus fair value of identifiable assets. It’s a way to put value on reputation, business

moat, location, talent, culture, etc. Even though heart is never mentioned, does not heart affect all these other things?

Business is run by people serving people. Empathy helps you understand the point of view of your ecosystem. Grace allows you to forgive the inevitable mistakes you or your people make so they can learn. Goodwill helps build the trust and reciprocal goodwill that makes the abundance flywheel turn.

## BUSINESS AS TRAINING GROUND

It is impossible to grow wisdom and heart without struggle. Many movies are based upon this formula that deeply resonates with us humans: ‘the hero’s journey’. The latter parts of this journey are the ordeal, transformation and reward. Is not running a business a cycle of these elements?

If you view the business and its problems as a training ground for your own growth and development, your perspective about problems can change enlarging yourself and your decision making.

Jocko Willink, a former Navy SEAL who wrote a few management books, discusses the term he and his team would use whenever something bad happened to them in the field: “good.” It’s not that the sense of calamity or struggles being good in and of themselves, it’s the sentiment that every challenge is a learning opportunity.

Now let me share 22 some practices I’ve found helpful in my own hero’s journey. Feel free to pick and choose those that may be right for you!

### 22 PRACTICES

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## 1. GRATITUDE AS INTERNAL FUEL

Often cited is the analogy that we are all like a tube of toothpaste—once squeezed, whatever is inside of us comes out. This means that under pressure, whatever we’ve built inside of us will reveal itself regardless of what our ego wants to reveal. I believe this is much like a fitness test. If you try to cram for the 5-mile run, you will invariably fail. You must do the work. Happily, I think only weeks of changed habits have dramatic impacts on what is inside of us.

At a Sunday bible study at Charleston, SC’s Mother Emanuel Church in 2015, an awkward young white man named Dylan Roof walked in unannounced. The traditionally African American church welcomed him into their study. After an hour, Mr Roof pulled out a .45 and shot nine dead within the church, intending to start a race war. This was a church, a holy place of worship. This was a historical location with deep historical African American roots. Yet in spite of the tragedy, only 48 hours later, while the shock and grief were at their peak, several surviving family members forgave Roof at his indictment hearing. Forgiveness, under stress and pressure unlike anything I hope any of us ever see. The Charleston community rallied around the people and the church in one of the most beautiful moments of solidarity I have ever personally witnessed. We held hands across the two-mile long Ravenel Bridge. We visited the church and prayed with the survivors. Forgiveness didn’t mean forgetting. It didn’t mean abandoning a quest for justice. It simply meant releasing the hold of anger within. Why would I include this story under a gratitude section?

I have been fascinated with what was inside the members of this church such that this was what came out when faced with pressures unimaginable. So I went to a few of their services for some insight. One thing struck me. Their services were mostly a celebration of gratitude. They didn’t preach anger, they preached hope and love. They were clear eyed and discussed issues, but in the context of love. In particular, many churches have a section called Prayers of Thanksgiving, where a member speaks for the congregation a list of things to be thankful for. The preacher at Emanuel didn’t read from a script. She closed her eyes, tapped into gratitude and ranted into beautiful poetry about blessings we see everyday but forget. Love of family. Love of sacred. Nature’s beauty. A warm smile. Yes... this is how we build gratitude inside of us. This is their practice.

At a DIG South Conference, I listened to the ‘millionaire maker’ Danelle Delgado talk about her system for “winning on repeat.” She is author of several books, including *I Choose Joy*. She talks about the process of building internal gratitude: having a gratitude journal to think intentionally about daily experiences that uplift. Storing our internal gratitude toothpaste.

Whether it be a journal, a prayer, or just being present in noticing the good around us, this is how we build what’s inside. And we get to choose WHAT we notice. In today’s hyper-media-driven world, you will be fed hate, division, and sensationalized anger at every turn. It’s what sells as our reptilian brains are conditioned to pay attention to threats. But resist and see it for what it is.

Don’t ignore reality. But make a daily practice of looking for good. You’ll then see it everywhere and it will affect what is inside of you. It’s not something that just comes out. It is necessary jet fuel for the heart you will need under pressure. And it helps with high performance, just ask the Blue Angels (or motivational speaker John Foley) about their motto: “glad to be here.”

## 2. NO ORDINARY MOMENTS—POWER OF PRESENCE

My karate instructor as a child was an amazing 8th degree black belt named Soke Rick Boyer.

The late Soke Boyer was the embodiment of the power of presence.

Soke means headmaster or originator, his style was Mukashi Kindai Ryu. Mukashi means long ago, Kindai means modern, Ryu means school. The ancient integrating into the modern. The old becoming new. Soke Boyer had a lifetime of training in various traditional Japanese martial arts and a career law enforcement officer, using techniques to defend himself and control vs. harming attackers. He blended tradition, empty handed techniques, and Japanese Ju Jutsu with realities on modern streets including defending with and against modern weapons. He also knew training techniques alone was not enough for a martial artist. The mind needed just as much training to overcome the fear response, see reality clearly, and to respond in an appropriately measured fashion.

From his enrollment materials: “The main aim of Mukashi Kindai Kai is to cultivate the character, personality, body and spirit of each member; to promote the discipline of the Martial Arts and the true nature of the “way” (Do). The “way”, often spoken of as Bushido or Budo, consists of a moral code of ethics which stresses justice, courage, benevolence, politeness, veracity, honor, loyalty, self-discipline and education.” My favorite line from his Code of Ethics: “To respect the rights of others, protect the innocent, forgive the ignorant, and temper judgment with compassion.” Right brain in charge of the left brain instilling a deep moral code. Is not wise discernment important before heading into battle? Or operating a business?

For my first-degree black belt, I needed to write a paper on the meaning of Bushido for the martial arts practitioner. Bushido was the warrior code for the Samurai in feudal Japan. The life of a Samurai was typically very short. Each battle was to the death. From my 1988 paper: “In the life of the samurai, there was no future or past, only present. This meant that every fight, every action was to be performed without reservation. Combined with the absence of past and future was the absence of ego. In the effort to become an invincible fighter, the samurai realized that ego during battle led to indecision, hesitation, and death. Thus fighting was the result of intuition and action acting simultaneously. You perceive, you cut—one in the same.” This is the ultimate of presence, being fully in the moment, especially as each one could be your last.

Carrying this outside of the battlefield, it means immersing yourself in a trade, craft or martial art such that it becomes a ‘do’ or way of being. The common thread is maintaining full presence into the joy of every single moment practicing a craft. It means not being bored by repetitive practice, seeing each new effort as brand new to be enjoyed and improved. In martial arts, improving upon a punch you’ve thrown maybe millions of times. In business, improving upon a product after its millionth shipment. In conversations, maintaining presence when you think you already know what will be said.

Dan Millman wrote a book of the same name of this section, *No Ordinary Moments*, that shows carrying this presence can bring with it a sense of wonder about all aspects of the world. Seeing everything for the first time. Martial arts is a wonderful training ground for this as you get in touch with your own mortality: the most fearsome fighter is one unafraid of death. And if death is at any corner, every waking moment is new and beautiful. And your presence becomes powerful in and of itself as others remain distracted by worries of the past or future.

Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Then look at something ordinary as if you were seeing it for the first time.

### 3. SACRED TRADITIONS

Most sacred traditions are deeply rooted in history and work towards developing heart in their teachings. I certainly don't have the authority to evaluate all sacred traditions and must leave the reader to follow their own path, but forgive my bias towards the Christian faith.

As my father attended a Catholic seminary (thank goodness for my mom!), faith and church were always part of my life growing up. Some of the most valuable parts of these experiences are talking to others who are going through the struggle and seeing how they get through with faith to the other side. I confess I've bounced around a few churches as we imperfect humans certainly can pervert what I believe to be original intent of the faith (like 'love your neighbor' in the Crusades). But having a home in a supportive faith community can be a wonderful way to develop your heart and wisdom.

### 4. THE POWER OF NATURE

We are inextricably linked to nature, which calls within us recognition of beauty calling and developing our hearts. Our souls respond to the beauty of majestic mountains, crystal blue waters, colorful birds singing, the way Spanish moss hangs from oak trees... Sometimes losing yourself inside God's creation can help you find inspiration whenever most needed. It can calm our minds and recenter our focus. Go take a walk. Go on a vacation and immerse yourself in the grandeur of nature. Put it on the calendar.

### 5. BELIEVING IN THE KARMIC POWER OF RECIPROCITY

I have always been fascinated by the interplay between selfishness and helping others. Do we help others purely out of charity or do we gain something in return? Will we be more likely to go to heaven if that's what seems called by our faith? Helping others is fun, an integral part of inner development towards your own happiness, and I believe consistent with our own self-interest.

I do absolutely know that helping others wherever possible has had an overwhelmingly positive impact on my life. It's not normally a reciprocal act from the person who received an act from me. It's usually a good fortune from something unrelated elsewhere in my life. It's people returning to me later that remembered something I did many years ago. It's the elevation in someone's day or attitude where I know will ripple into areas completely outside my influence.



*Soke Rick Boyer's drawing of a Samurai - mid 1980s*

These gratitude enhancing pings will follow you through time. A former flight student who just made captain on a wide-body A330 responded to my congratulations with a heartfelt ‘thank you’ and copy of his first logbook page with a row of my signatures. A marketing business owner told me I was their first client, thanks for believing in them... after I congratulated them on a growth award. A dear friend who refers business cites the donation I gave when he ran a nonprofit many years earlier. A impromptu \$100 tip to bartender (I don’t know why, but it felt right) happened to be on someone’s birthday, was going through a rough time, and the owners let me know later the positive impact it had. Random, unexpected acts of kindness can be enormously powerful and will return a boost in gratitude when you don’t expect it.

I would argue the opposite is true from unkind acts, but you probably never see ‘why’ someone told another not to do business with you.

Reciprocity is built into our DNA, we remember both people who helped us and hurt us. In Dale Carnegie’s revolutionary book written in the Great Depression (30 million+ sold), *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, genuine acts of kindness are an integral part throughout in building social capital. BUT, it must be genuine. People can smell manipulation if you project expectation of immediate reciprocity. The magic is in learning to be kind for the sake of being kind, especially for those who are least likely to be able to reciprocate.

Try it regularly, you will be amazed by the power... and be patient in any reward. And enjoy the gratitude you give and receive. This is slow moving ROI but it inevitably compounds. Do something nice for someone randomly and make it a habit. Watch how you become more fortunate and optimistic. And then watch how you gain gratitude simply by the positive impact you start having in other people. A glorious personal growth flywheel.

## 6. SENDING LOVE

Many spiritual traditions advocate for prayers of goodwill for others. This is an action that the recipient knows nothing about. Why would it help anything? I’d argue the internal benefits are undeniable and the external changes are plausible.

This practice is simply sitting with focused attention of goodwill. You spend a few minutes daily sending out feelings of goodwill towards other specific people. Family. Friends. Co-workers. Leaders. Even ‘enemies’. This regular practice encourages you to think about others, what is going on in their lives, and what they might be experiencing. It is the internal practice of empathy, a critical skill for any leader and one that is starting to be measured even within some private equity circles prior to their investment. But does it affect the recipient of thoughtful goodwill?

Well, a fascinating book written by two physics professors Bruce Rosenblum and Fred Kuttner, *The Quantum Enigma: Physics Encounters Consciousness* explores whether human intention affects physical outcomes. What if our brains are entanglement machines? What if our brains resolve superposition with intent? Intentionality certainly affects our own actions (I’ll discuss below), but there is some evidence it can affect others.

A commonly cited study about effects of intention on others was the ‘Maharishi Effect’ in 1993. A group of 4000 gathered in DC and other cities to pray for a reduction in crime. Crime dropped almost 25% adjusted for weather and other variables, statistically highly unlikely by itself. But critics rightly argue many factors affect crime and thus another variable could have been the cause. Correlation isn’t always causation. But, what if?

So, send love regularly to build your own EQ (emotional intelligence). And maybe you’ll actually be helping others in the process.

## 7. WHOLE BODY LISTENING

You know as a business owner there is no better way of proving a theory or improving yourself than putting an idea into reality. The best way to practice empathy is one-on-one conversations where you're intentional about improving your skills.

We are all busy and sometimes we just need efficient conversations that share time-sensitive information in an abbreviated manner. This is frequently the norm and certainly widely accepted as a regular business practice. "Just the facts, ma'am." But for some meetings, such as employee reviews, meetings to discuss strategy, or when someone visits your office with a more complex question—it is a great opportunity to practice whole body listening with presence.

Take a deep breath and clear your mind. Eliminate the distractions of your cell phone and active screens on your computer. Turn to fully face the person you want to hear and do your best to understand what is spoken with their words and their body. Put yourself in their shoes. Then, if appropriate, respond. It just takes a little practice and intentionality, but you will learn more about your employees, your business and yourself.

## 8. EMBRACE THE STRUGGLE AS A GROWTH OPPORTUNITY

You did not go into business assuming it was going to be easy. You felt that your grit and determination would allow you to will the business into being successful. Welcome to the 'school of hard knocks,' the best education you will ever receive.

Your perspective on these struggles will greatly determine how much you will actually learn. Jocko Willink, a former Navy SEAL now author of bestseller *Extreme Ownership*, wrote about his learned response to any potential challenge: "good." It is an intentional effort to reframe each challenge as an opportunity to learn. Didn't get that huge contract? "Good." Supply chains are disrupted? "Good." I can't say this any better, so going to quote him: "As long as you're alive, you still have some fight left in you. So get up, dust off, reload, recalibrate, reengage, and go back on the attack." The recalibration is where the learning happens.

## 9. MAGICAL EYES OF RECOGNITION, COMPASSION, AND WISDOM

This is one of the simplest and shortest ways to build a small amount of trust and heart. What the heck am I talking about? I know you've seen these eyes before and it struck you. Someone looked at you in a way that was more than a simple greeting. It was recognizing your humanity, an immediate connection to you as a person, and with knowing eyes revealing a small peek at wisdom. I've seen it from both old and young people, they are always memorable. It's a look with a knowing confident smile looking fully into someone's eyes as a very simple and intentional act of kindness. I find that a kind look into the eyes of everyone I meet increases calm and connection even if no words are spoken. Try it.

## 10. LISTENING TO GUT AND HEART—FINDING OUR FLOW STATE

What does listening to your gut feel like? What does listening to your heart feel like? Is there a difference? I believe there is.

Intuition is a powerful tool for anyone, especially a business owner. It is a felt sense that something is right or wrong without an explanation that is easy to uncover. Most owners learn quickly to listen to their gut. A contract that feels off. A potential hire that doesn't feel right. A sense that a competitor is about to launch a threat to your business. To me, gut is more active when there is a felt sense of danger. It is when you feel something within the lower part of your gut that feels unsettled. It is a commonly cited term in self-defense where you may not be certain why, but an incongruity heightens your senses. Law enforcement and martial arts instructors would advise you to listen to this instinct and act accordingly with ample studies showing the accuracy of this heightened sense.

To me, following my heart is my body highlighting something important or special within my interests. It is something that piques curiosity. It is an unexpected moment of beauty. It is a coincidence that draws your attention. What I call a 'God wink' or others may call a synchronicity or attractor. It is when your heart opens up telling you to pay attention, THIS is important and you need to explore why.

You may be surprised to know scientists have studied these instincts and found significant evidence supporting these sources of felt knowledge. Both the gut and the heart regions have among the highest concentrations of neurons outside of the brain and communicate regularly with the brain. The heart region actually sends more to the brain than vice versa! We are built to listen. Yet interestingly, when the left part of our brain—logic, reason—is most active, we can easily become consumed by this activity and ignore the other signals that are coming from our own bodies. We do this at our peril as it eliminates significant sources of information necessary for good decisions. It is the definition of over-thinking and absolute death to athletes or professionals who need to reach a flow state for peak performance. Developing heart through gratitude is thus a powerful way to build your capacity for heart and flow. But you need to be able to get your left brain out of the way.

In the first part of Soke Boyer's two-hour class, we would always meditate for 5–10 minutes. We would sit in a comfortable position, focus on slowing down our breathing, and visualize counting in and out. In through nose, out through mouth. Breathing in all that is good, breathing out all that is bad. Sometimes trying to slow our breathing as much as possible. Sometimes he would take us on a mental journey to the beach, or into the woods, or into the mountains. The purpose of this practice was two-fold: emptying our cup from a busy day so it could be filled with knowledge and helping us be able to quiet our minds and reach flow.

As a martial artist, musician, pilot, money manager and meditation practitioner, all have trained me how to quiet the mind and reach flow. I've landed airplanes after engine failures. I've taken punches but kept wits to hit back. I've traded large portfolios during the '08 financial crisis and bull market booms. I've played music in front of hundreds of people. And I still have weak spots, I sometimes find it hard to quiet the self-judgement when I solo musically. But I have worked actively to listen to my gut, heart and moderate the loud logic shouted by my internal engineer. How?



*Soke Rick Boyer's drawing - mid 1980s*

I find the best way to be able to listen to heart and gut is practicing the quieting of the mind through meditation or other 'embodiment' practices. Meditation is sitting quietly while focusing only on breath and has been a human practice for thousands of years. I first learned through martial arts. The samurai warrior knew that they needed to see clearly or their lives were ended in a single cut. They practiced meditation focusing on breath while imagining their minds were the reflection of a flowing stream on a full moon. Random thoughts disturbed the water and distorted the image—true flow quiets the mind perfectly reflecting the moon.

Activities like playing music and flying a plane are wonderful ways to practice silencing the brain, but they involve concentration on something else. The

trick is being able to silence through breath alone as you always have it with you.

If your mind is quiet, you can hear your gut and heart giving you the superpower of intuition and flow. Of course, it's difficult for the mind to be quiet if it only hears pain signals coming from your body.

## 11. BE WOO CURIOUS—IT ASSISTS NECESSARY OPTIMISM

I try to stay grounded in all things as I believe firmly that “if your head is in the clouds, it’s easy for someone to pierce your heart.” But, there is so much that we don’t understand about ourselves and the universe.

The majority of Americans have had a mystical experience, defined as something perhaps unexplainable by science. I count myself in this majority. I was present when my father passed away and we all saw synchronicities defying odds. I’ve had ‘pings’ from son just knowing something was wrong from afar and wonderfully timely conversations confirmed suspicions. I thought I saw God as a child, hearing Him say “I know you.” Could science explain all these things? Maybe... but Occom’s Razor leads me to believe there is a higher and benevolent power at work.

The majority of the world believe in some kind of religion, which all have their own mystical beliefs. My own faith includes profound mysteries. Christianity is very mystical.

For thousands of years, we humans have documented nearly identical experiences across cultures when near death. Unconditional love, moving towards a light.

I’m not here telling you I understand the full mysteries of the universe. I am telling you being grounded while curious helps build your heart and your optimism that a higher power has a say in our fate.

## 12. TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR STRESS RESPONSE AND YOUR HEALTH

Stress and poor health can override our hearts and decision making. Unfortunately, we do not have a health system in the US—we have a sickness management system. And the world, especially since COVID, has traumatized our nervous system with a constant barrage of advertised threats both real and imagined. Turns out, humans have found ways to handle stress and keep the body healthy for generations before relying on the miracles of modern medicine to cure our ills. What’s old is new again. And the stress in both our brains and bodies can affect the quality of our sensemaking.

We all know the basics: eat healthy foods, exercise regularly and get enough sleep. But our bodies need so much more than only these things to stay healthy. This is an area I would encourage you to explore far more deeply than anything I write. My belief is that we’re all different and that our bodies need their own unique combination of food, exercise, stretching, and stress relief. The unfortunate part of health today is that the modern health system will provide limited guidance in remaining healthy and will likely ignore anything that doesn’t involve a pill or procedure.

Many ancient practices help with complete body wellness, such as Yoga, Ayurveda, and Yiquan, We should steward our bodies with as much energy as we steward our businesses.

## 13. POWER OF POSITIVE THINKING AND MANIFESTATION

You didn’t start a business expecting to fail. Most business owners are well versed in positive thinking. Due to its importance, hundreds of books and coaches help high performing owners, athletes, and executives of all kinds incorporate this level of thinking into their day-to-day. But maybe I can add a little something to topic as to why I believe positive thinking is so effective and several practices that incorporate heart into goal-setting and manifesting your dreams.

I just finished a wonderful book, *Into the Magic Shop* by neurosurgeon James Doty. The book is a testimonial to the power of manifesting your dreams through presence and visualization. He was a poor young man with an alcoholic father who somehow made his way into medical school with a 2.5 GPA (as he worked to support himself and his parents). Dr. Doty talks quite a bit about neuroplasticity, how the brain adapts to the needs of its environment. This is a beautiful human superpower we all possess.

We all probably know about the incredible power of setting goals. That writing these goals down and tracking dramatically increases the likelihood of accomplishing these goals. This is not the end of the story, visualizing our goals changes our brains into manifestation machines.

Visualization is more than thinking about a goal passively. It is setting time aside to see yourself achieving these goals. What clothes you're wearing. The smells in the air. The people around you. Full immersion into the future accomplishment of a goal. Written down. The brain absolutely takes note and transforms into an engine helping you achieve this goal. Manifesting this goal. Halfway efforts are ineffective, but dedicating yourself to envisioning your goals transforms your brain into helping you recognize all the things you need to achieve the goal. It is the magic referenced in the book. However, what if the goals are not what we really want? After all, Midas wanted gold... he didn't anticipate his goal would result in a deadly touch.

Here is where heart is so important. What is it you want? I mean, what is it you REALLY want? When it's all said and done, and you're 6 feet under, what would you have considered success? Was it the Porsche? (I mean, that is pretty darn cool). Or is it more about meaning, connection, the impact you had on people, the amazing project you never started?

This is why tapping into your HEART to help make sure the ladder you choose to climb is placed against the right wall. Otherwise, you could be wasting your time on that which ultimately is not as important to you. Next is a very cool mental exercise to figure that out.

#### **14. ATTENDING YOUR OWN FUNERAL**

Why do people change after a near-death experience? In those moments when you realize you no longer have any time left on this earth, your mind crystallizes all the things you wanted as most important to you. It gives you joy, regret and an URGENT need to finish what you started.

When I was a young flight instructor in Indianapolis trying to find my way in life, on Thanksgiving Day, I received a call that my dad had a heart attack, and I needed to come home. I did so immediately, arriving in time before his procedure.

My dad was unbelievably driven. After attending seminary to be a priest, happily for me he decided he couldn't live without his grade-school sweetheart, my mom. The youngest of six, he was first one in his family to go to college. His dad owned a chain of auto part stores in Indiana, the first one in his family to leave generations of farmers to go into business. Dad graduated college in 3 years working part time to pay for school. He joined the Navy to help pay for Medical School and married my mom. He took his Board exam the day I was born... the first one to finish and of COURSE he passed. He built a thriving practice in general surgery saving so many lives and making lots of money. Cancer patients. Trauma patients. Life and death most days. Emergency calls at 2am. Surgeries lasting many hours while he was on his feet. Unfortunately, driven to both provide and rescue people as a general surgeon with long hours, by his early 40s he also had neglected his body. He smoked, was overweight, didn't exercise, worked long hours, and even had a family history of heart disease as his older brother had passed of a heart attack a few years earlier. It was inevitable.

When they took him back for his procedure, we all said we loved him and he was in great spirits knowing all the medical professionals on his team. It was to be an atherectomy, which cuts away the calcified plaque. It didn't go well. The nurses told us he coded on the table, they had to shock him several times to bring him back and needed to go right into open heart. He was conscious but sedated and they brought us out to see him as they rolled him frantically into the OR. We all thought it was a tearful 'goodbye'. I was the oldest of 4, our young family prayed in tears as we waited. Thanks to the team who wanted to rescue a beloved colleague, dad survived, even with significant damage to his heart.

In the months that followed as he healed from the painful cracking open of his chest, dad wrote something to himself that he never shared with any of us. He called it “Memoirs of an MI”. MI stands for multicaudial infraction. It was his near-death experience. In the years that followed, dad transformed his life. He sold his thriving practice to his partner. He started Lowcountry Hernia Center, focusing only on hernias—an elective outpatient procedure that didn’t require stays in the hospital or emergency call. He took a huge pay cut, but spent more time with family, being actively involved in his church, and doing things he loved. He found his balance and inspired all of us in the process. His damaged but mighty heart, who doctors told him might last another ten years, carried him as he laughed and loved to 2026 at ripe age of 81.

I don’t wish a near death experience on anyone. But I believe you can begin to touch into these important thoughts and feelings with an exercise also within Covey’s *7 Habits* book, writing your own eulogy—in the chapter, ‘Beginning with the End in Mind’. Yeah, THAT end. I would encourage you to buy the book. Set aside an hour of uninterrupted time and follow the exercise. Imagine every small part of your own funeral... who is there, the flowers, the casket, the grave, and most importantly: what you want said. These are the words from your heart pointing you to the ladders to climb.

As an aside, I do everything I can to live a long life. Exercise, diet, staying grateful, keeping blood pressure down, choosing to be with people who support rather than extract. But imagine if we think we are going to live forever? Would we put off that which is most important to us? Would our minds wander to goals more of the flesh than of the heart? I say ‘yes.’ I am hopeful for medical research extending our lives, but such actions should not take away from our focus on living our lives with our ladders up the right walls.

## 15. DEFYING DEATH

Another observation, you ever notice the people who are more alive than others? Those who seem to grasp each moment with awe, wonder and maybe even some grandeur? Certainly our constitutions can make a difference, whether we’re ADHD and have brains that won’t shut down or hypothyroidism suppressing our natural energy. But I have noticed those who test their own mortality, even safely, seem to be more in touch with living actively in the moment.

In many cultures throughout history, growing up required some kind of initiation involving danger or facing up to our mortality that marked the passage between a child and an adult. A journey into the wilderness alone... a first hunt... vision quests... lengthy fasting... psychedelics... quests. Our movie culture taps into this deep need we all have with the hero/heroine’s journey mentioned earlier. It’s why this template is so popular involving: departure, descent, ordeal, transformation and return. Luke Skywalker in Star Wars. Spiderman. Superman. We may not be able to mirror all this for ourselves, but I believe a practice that (safely) reminds you of your mortality is a powerful way to stay in touch with what’s important.

Of course, there are some amazing retreats that attempt to create your own initiation—such as retreats by Richard Rohr or Bill Plotkin. But this is one reason I so love martial arts. It constantly reminds you of your own mortality, it reminds you evil exists and gives you agency to protect yourself, and it’s great exercise! Flying is another wonderful way and it’s statistically very safe. Although in full disclosure, when I was a flight instructor 30 years ago, I had several people inadvertently try to kill me in a small plane in addition to several flight emergencies. Truth: aircraft are safer today. Long hikes outdoors, especially with a group of like-minded people. Obviously there are an unlimited number of opportunities to seek adventure in this beautiful world and I can’t list them all. You don’t necessarily need to take risk to trick your mind into risk. Go find your adventure.

## 16. PERSONAL MISSION STATEMENT

After all that good work, it would be a shame to forget the findings of your heart!

A personal mission statement documents what you hold dear and provides the true north for more specific projects and goals you hold. It doesn't need to be complicated, just an easy reference that will help you tap quickly into what your heart most desires as you make decisions. It's easy to do an online search for examples and of course Covey's 7 *Habits* book has a nice worksheet immediately after writing a eulogy.

Here's mine as an example:

*To do my best to love and serve God, my family, and my friends... in that order. To be a visionary steward in business, allowing and empowering all those around me to flourish to their highest potential. To see clearly, love deeply, be a builder of trust, and architect of opportunity. To leave people and communities stronger than I find them.*

The next steps are breaking down your roles, your goals, mapping them into 1 & 3 year goals, and then translating these into what are you going to do today. I will leave these details to your favorite consultants or books.

## 17. DEFINING YOUR OWN ABUNDANCE

I have no problem with more or others seeking more. While exceptions exist for rent seeking or gaming the system for advantage, for the most part, business owners who are successful did so on their own merits—adding a benefit to society that rewarded them financially. Nobody forced you to buy that iPhone so elegantly designed, and billionaires were made. Sure, luck plays a part. Sure, some received more advantages than others. But few businesses have a prayer of success without hard work, ingenuity, and a well delivered idea, product, or service. We still live in a society where someone who believes in themselves, never accepts 'no' as the end of a story, never accepts obstacles as excuses... can make it. It is little wonder why so many from around the world want to be here or envy what we have. But, we can certainly do better!

This entire section is about raising our heart, discernment, wisdom and capacity for more. But at what point do we consider the 'enough' for ourselves and pivot to the more for others? I believe this is a deeply personal decision that shouldn't be made from someone else, who invariably has other agendas. It's up to you.

Happily, I think the beginning of this process is doing the math—getting a personalized financial plan. Yes, I'm a planner, which means I'm self-interested in everyone doing a financial plan. But hear me out.

Define the material needs you and your family have. What type of lifestyle do you want? What type of goodies do you want on your balance sheet, from cars, real estate, etc? What do you plan to fund for family, education, down payments, business startup expenses, special needs, etc? Once you've written it all out and even dreamed about it... a financial plan lets you know what you need to reach these goals. And it's a finite number. It's defining your own personal abundance, even if you have the right to change it. But that's not necessarily where the magic happens. The magic is when your balance sheet exceeds this finite number! What do you plan on doing with the extra? This is where it can get exceedingly fun. What mission or mark on society would you want to make? With your expertise and drive, how much good in the world can you accomplish with this extra? I call this aspirational wealth and it encourages you to think as a steward of the wealth in addition to the owner. It all goes away in the end anyway into whatever is said at your eulogy. It also helps to defend the allure of more for the sake of more... and power for the sake of power. Which throughout history has destroyed its wielders. It helps keep you away from the dark side of significant wealth. And keeps you and your family, likely, far happier.

## 18. THINKING LIKE A STEWARD

Being in the Conscious Capitalism ecosystem, I've seen many definitions of how to think about others. Stakeholder capitalism. B-Corporations. Having an ESG focus (environmental, social and governance business focus). Running a business of impact. Nothing against any of these, but I think my friend and author David Grau has isolated this concept most elegantly: thinking like a steward. A steward of your own profits, your family's well-being, your business, your employee's well-being, your suppliers trust, your community, and the environment where you live. It holds no political baggage. It doesn't mandate something "from off" (Charleston speak for outsiders). It leaves decisions to those who are closest to those impacted while encouraging decision makers to try and see how all people, places and things within your ecosystem are interrelated.

Thinking like a steward is not easy, especially as a business grows. And must always have profits first, because without it—the business and the ecosystem do not exist. It is why self-development is so important as the business grows. But what an opportunity! An owner with a big heart and thinking like a steward can truly create a business of abundance—for the entire ecosystem.

**What does this look like? A business focused upon:**

- profits
- employee growth
- customer advocacy
- local engagement
- trust-building rituals
- dignity
- shared ownership and/or an ownership mentality
- aligned incentive structures
- recognition structures
- FUN

## 19. HAVE FAITH IN YOUR PEOPLE AND SPONTANEOUS ORGANIZATION

The invisible hand is a powerful metaphor for all forms of spontaneous organization. Of course, it shows up within millions of individual pricing decision to reveal the hidden price of a good or service. It shows up during natural disasters when people rally to help others. It shows up whenever there is trust, agency, stake in the outcome and a common mission. This is a powerful combination proven throughout business and life, utilize it at every given opportunity.

## 20. HAVING A WISDOM BUDGET

Benjamin Franklin said, "An investment into knowledge pays the best interest." Yet in his autobiography, he famously focused upon 13 aspects of character—and even kept a scorecard on how he rated himself on these virtues. Character... virtue... what was old, with AI eating all the knowledge of the world, is now new again. I think Franklin would agree in my modern-day modification: "An investment into wisdom development pays the best interest."

If you want to build or develop anything, you need a research and development budget. Today, I don't think there is a more important line item on your P&L. A time budget so you can explore these concepts. A financial budget to invest into retreats, coaches, training, sacred traditions or other tools that help build your own heart and wisdom.

Think of your business also as a training ground for your development. It is the opportunity to develop your inner world and inspire your ecosystem.

## 21. PRACTICE WIN-WIN OR NO DEAL

As you build your inner wisdom and consider yourself a steward, you'll notice more and more instances where a business relationship or transaction can be win-lose or win-win depending on the trust you have built. It also helps you recognize people who may not be operating within this framework and continue to pursue winning for the sake of winning without regard to you. Candidly, sometimes a young business looking to grow and establish itself will need to work with everyone to survive longer into more nuanced decision making. But when you're there, consider what Brian Whetten (the coach mentioned earlier) calls, "win-win or no deal". This is a deliberate effort to surround yourself with those of high trust who are also interested in your success. This effort can create a highly profitable and enjoyable 'walled garden', making your abundance business more abundant.

## 22. RECOGNIZE THE POWER OF YOUR AGENCY

Business owners are comfortable with responsibility, but your agency is something to be recognized and developed. Especially as your decisions affect so many.

Holocaust survivor, psychiatrist and author Viktor Frankl wrote *Man's Search for Meaning* as a meditation on how some people survived while others perished in the Nazi concentration camps. Much like Covey's *7 Habits* book and your own chosen wisdom literature, I consider it required reading. To me it is a powerful testament to the ability of humans to not only endure unspeakable conditions, but also the power of spirit to both overcome and learn from these events.

One of the core principles of his book: what greatly differentiates humans from other animals is our ability to hold space between stimulus and response so we can CHOOSE the best response. An animal will choose fight or flight, and certainly we have that instinct inside of us. But we have so many more options with that space between.

What Frankl found was that captors could strip away all freedom, possessions and inflict pain. But captors had no control over this space between or the corresponding response. This was a source of final freedom and hope. Those that were able to practice this pause and activate self-awareness kept a sense of freedom and hope and thus were more likely to survive. Creating this space, creating this agency within ourselves is one of the most powerful traits of being human.

Interestingly, it is also identified within Boyd's decision-making OODA loop framework discussed earlier. The O and D in the middle are indeed the space between: orient and decide. It's so much more than stimulus and then response.

How we manage ourselves in this space in-between is critical. Developing the ability to slow down, breathe, clear your mind, "count to ten" as momma said, is another powerful way to fully engage the better parts of our own agency. It helps us to resist the algos, media, or just a miserable person in your space pulling at the reptilian fear centers of your brain.

In today's polarized society, it is easy to think our actions have no consequence outside of business. Yet we can make a huge difference in the tone, optimism, growth and abundance of society... even raising the bar for what's expected in our political leaders. Cynicism feels sophisticated. Endless critique feels intelligent. But building, mentoring, serving, employing, creating, risking, teaching, and stewarding require courage. Agency is the antidote to nihilism.

Businesses run by big-hearted owners elevate all those around them... family, employees, suppliers, community, environment... the exact way movements begin.

Meaningful societal renewal rarely begins in centralized systems. It begins locally—in homes, teams, businesses, schools, churches, neighborhoods, friendships, and communities where trust still exists and human beings still know each other by name.

## THE ABUNDANCE FLYWHEEL

So how does a business owner put their heart-led leadership into practice? This is my effort to elegantly encapsulate in this section into the following graphic. I hope it helps to integrate and summarize how a business owner can create abundance for all those around them as they develop themselves.

Seeing clearly—This is developing our sensemaking amidst endless calls for fear. It's being able to see both risks AND the good in the world as we direct our own attention. And it's integrating our left/right brains and gut/heart to see not just the cold-hearted logic of a situation, but how people and systems are interconnected so we can be stewards of our resources with wisdom and heart.

Lead with heart—While developing ourselves, it's translating our integrated discernment into agency-driven leadership. It's inspiring our employees. It's making the difficult decisions with compassion. It's developing vision for the future growth of the company that involves the development of its people. It's choosing win-win vs. win-lose as we recognize our choice. It's connecting your decision making with your developing heart. It's beginning or enhancing your own culture of gratitude and excellence.

Build trust—The natural consequence of heart-led leadership is the trust built within your ecosystem. People do not believe they are means to an end. They feel heard. People don't believe they are pockets of value for extraction. They know their interests and personal growth are mutually beneficial to your own. Develop people—If people see themselves as valuable and understand how they may benefit from development (some kind of stake in the outcome), they will be much more interested in development and growth. Help them see what you see. Help them develop their business skills. Help them develop their soft skills, sensemaking, heart, and EQ. Inspire them to similarly grow into the best version of themselves.

Create agency—Once the foundations of trust and development are formed, now you can align with your mission and give your people wings. Allow them to succeed and fail. See what they can improvise. Communicate so that you see what they see giving you a much more comprehensive view of everything affecting your business. Adjust as needed to follow the assets and momentum that builds in your business.

Increase capacity—As the business grows with newfound agency, the big-hearted owner can choose to increase capacity of business through additional hires or additional product lines. Not getting ahead of itself, but continuing heart-led leadership towards the mission of your business.

Create opportunity—As the big-hearted owner receives additional insights from their employees, they can identify and capitalize on opportunities either newly sourced... or as a continuation of sustainable growth consistent with the mission.



Strengthen community—As the mission-driven business grows, the big-hearted owner can engage in the community through: business-sponsored charitable functions, supporting employee backed charities, and involvement in community activities. These activities help to increase the ecosystem affected by the business leading to...

More trust—... both inside and outside the organization. Creating an environment where goodwill, gratitude and reciprocity generate a culture of abundance. Leading to...

...Seeing clearly once again. Using the flywheel to build themselves, build their employees, build their business, and build their community in a powerfully organic manner. A business of abundance. A business as a source of profits, wisdom, courage, temperance, and heart. One business at a time.

Of course, this flywheel doesn't affect only your employees and your bottom line. Abundance, wisdom, and trust find their ways into your community. You, your employees, and sometimes even family of employees with a heightened sense of gratitude and growth go out into the world. Everyone interacts with suppliers, customers, and the community being the person who chooses empathy over anger and changes the tone. I believe the demand is high, almost like dominoes standing in line waiting to be pushed. We're tired of the anger. We're desperate for leadership.



We don't want to take the place of churches or other sources of wisdom. The more of these centers we have, the more dominoes get pushed and more are affected. But one at a time, this is how movements happen. Imagine if we have businesses around the country operating in this way and influencing culture.... Maybe, we can change the world.



# PART IX. EXAMPLES OF HEART-CENTERED LEADERSHIP

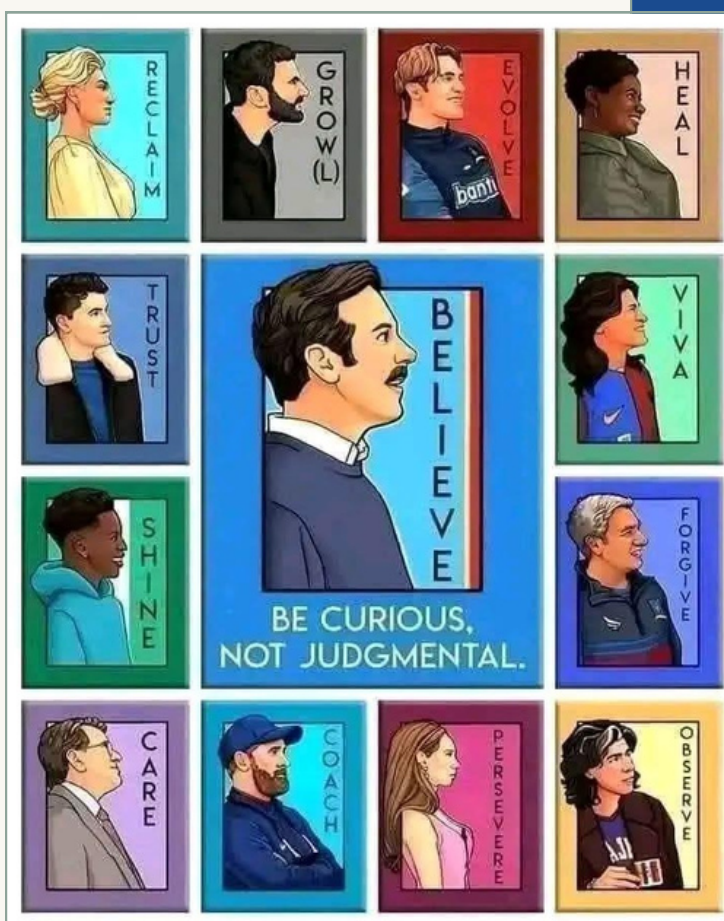
Writing is a form of fully awake meditation that forces you to think deeper about your topic. The process also transforms your brain to notice anything related to your topic either through active research, following hunches or exploring small curiosities. Since writing my book in 2022 that included observations within myself and some wonderful business owners I had been fortunate enough to know, I noticed that there are a world of people and owners who have successfully put many of these ideas into practice. Most of these ideas are not new, even if this is a unique synthesis of these ideas. Indeed, most of these ideas are taught in business schools, even if the focus is primarily on larger companies. In this section, I'm going to cover some real examples of leaders who lead with big hearts, but I'm going to start off with one that is imaginary.

## TED LASSO

Ted Lasso was released by AppleTV+ in August 2020 when the world was in COVID lockdowns and a presidential election year, quickly becoming an unexpected sensation. The reason I believe it's important for this paper are the same reasons it became popular.

COVID accelerated the loss of trust we see in society from our major institutions. We became isolated from one another and relied upon news sources that were sometimes unreliable and polarizing. Normally when people face a common external threat, people tend to come together and join in overcoming that threat. COVID was different. Isolation meant we relied upon news and screens more than ever before. It pushed us into the algorithms. Kids lost years of socialization from their isolation, angering them and stunting growth.

And more money was spent on politics in 2020 than any in previous years—more than DOUBLE the previous presidential election cycle. And I don't have to tell you, it was amongst the ugliest campaigning in our history. We are social creatures and were unable to socialize making us angry... and I think that anger carries through to today.



*Ted Lasso - Apple TV*

Yet as we were barely 6 months into lockdowns and 3 months before an election in one of the angriest parts of our history, this goofy big-hearted coach provided the country a reminder that goodness still existed. And they responded. It became the biggest hit in Apple's TV history, pushing its subscriber base up over 50%. Becoming the second most watched program on TV by its second season and winning 20 Emmy nominations. By the third season, it had become the most watched original streaming series in history with almost 17 billion minutes viewed! For a 30-minute comedy program released by one of the smallest streaming services in the market! If nothing else, it showed there is a huge demand for a big heart. It reminded people of the importance of community, being human, acting with grace, the impact of kindness and a big heart. I personally cannot wait until season 4 later this fall.

Mr./Ms. Business Owner... if there's a huge demand for something, what do you as a business owner do about it??

The traits discussed in this paper are the exact traits exemplified by Coach Lasso. He listens with empathy. He is kind to everyone, seeing them for who they are vs who the world tells them they are. He is vulnerable, suffering from panic attacks and a broken family. He empowers his people. He is grounded in reality but projects optimism, especially about his people. He is courageous, making decisions considered to be unpopular but that he believes good for the team. He thinks with all parts of his brain, coming up with ideas that meet complex moments. He is slow to anger, but tough when required (the hilarious 'Led Tasso' episode as he became an angry version of himself). He has fun. Wisdom with left and right brains. Courage. Temperance. Heart. This is a template worthy of aspiration.

The show also demonstrates that a sunny disposition is not required to be effective and to show heart. Roy Kent hardly ever smiles. He can be intensely intimidating and is not afraid of staring down a fool. He will not sugar-coat his opinion. Yet in spite of being deliberately aloof, the players all look up to him and follow his advice. And behind the angry façade is a man with a massive heart who: forgives his arch-enemy and trains him, treats his 8 year-old niece as a princess—wearing a goofy pink shirt that she made for him, and gets beyond himself to eventually open up to (a select few) others.

Yeah, I think much can be learned from Ted Lasso. I especially enjoyed this grid of the characters posted on their social media channels. I could probably write a little about each of their own leadership styles, but the heart found in the show is undeniable.

Of course, this show is fiction. But the world needs as many real Ted Lasso's or Roy Kent's as we can find—leaders with heart. The demand is overwhelming.

## KING SOLOMON

Regardless of your faith affiliation, I believe his leadership has valuable lessons for all of us. King Solomon was widely regarded as one of the wisest and wealthiest leaders in history. He may not have had the snappy one-liners of Ted Lasso, but his leadership style maps closely with all I've discussed so far in this paper.

Early in his reign, rather than asking for wealth, power or resources... his first priority was building out his heart: "Give your servant an understanding heart to govern your people." 1 Kings 3:5–14. He was humble in understanding his weaknesses yet somehow knew his heart was the key to strong leadership.

King Solomon presided over one of the most profitable and peaceful eras in Jewish history. He built the Temple, negotiated alliances, promoted trade, and was widely loved by his people. And when The Queen of Sheba visited to see what it was all about, her observations were not of a despotic ruler. She found that wisdom and heart led to a flourishing society with happy people. "Happy are your men! Happy are your servants, who continually stand before you and hear your wisdom!"— 1 Kings 10:8

What's old is new again.

## DUKE ELLINGTON



*The Charleston Jazz Orchestra*

If you know me long enough, sooner or later you'll hear me gushing about the history of jazz in Charleston, including the incredible artists who are carrying on that history today. And I believe that jazz performance and jazz leadership have hugely beneficial lessons for big-hearted owners.

A live jazz performance is the embodiment of spontaneous organization—a tune moves along with the improvisational talking and listening of talented

members all seeking... and frequently finding those magical moments of transcendence that turn the ordinary into something profoundly beautiful. It requires understanding of chord structures and rhythms, the foundation of music. It requires a common goal, the performance of a particular song. It promotes musicians for merit alone, as race and socioeconomic backgrounds have no bearing on live performance. It requires active listening with full presence as live performances are an intimate musical conversation. It requires minimizing your ego and maximizing the use of heart to work towards entering a beautiful flow state. And it requires trust and grace between band members, especially as mistakes will happen. As those mistakes can frequently turn into a song's most captivating moments.

These are all qualities promoted by a big-hearted leader to empower their team. Trust, common goal, stake in outcome, grace, and training where more work is needed.

There's nothing like live music, watching the musical conversation, knowing what is about to happen is unique to that moment and may not happen again. It's drama, uncertainty and usually results in the reward of beauty when in the hands of skilled musicians.

*"Jazz is a manifestation of the deepest American ideals... the closest thing to ideal democracy."- John Batiste*

*"Jazz is an art form that teaches you how to reconcile differences." -Wynton Marsalis*

*"Jazz is about being in the moment. It's about listening deeply. If somebody plays something unexpected, instead of judging it as a mistake, you make it part of the story." -Herbie Hancock*

## BUSINESS EXAMPLES

Does any of this work in actual business practice... where big-hearted practices lead to profit and businesses of abundance? Especially recently, multiple studies indicate the answer is 'yes' in both publicly traded and smaller closely held companies. My main interest, of course, is in the closely held company, but I'll include a few larger examples at the end.

Working with amazing people is by far the best part of my job. It's one of the reasons I hold such high optimism about the future as I see inspirational people and owners everywhere I go. Partially as my brain has been trained to notice them. I've worked with many owners who fit within this framework and it inspired my book and my continued interest in big-hearted capitalism. This doesn't mean they are all

perfect and embody every single point made in this paper, but it does mean that they each are deliberate about leading with heart. Most of the time, these companies are operating with little widespread recognition and are too small to be MBA case studies.

I've found it fascinating the parallels of independent studies attempting to analyze and isolate the traits of businesses leading with purpose (in appendix). Most have differing focus points: impact and measurement of empathy in owners, traits of sustainable growth companies, impact of employee ownership, impact of 'small giants' (companies that pursue greatness vs size), employee satisfaction's impact on performance, and involvement in community. Interestingly, organizations approaching this question from completely different directions have arrived at remarkably similar conclusions. Following are abbreviated findings and I'd encourage you to research further:



*"Clear eyes, full hearts, can't lose."  
—Coach Taylor, Friday Night Lights*

- **National Center for Employee Ownership**—some form of employee ownership coupled with transparency, stake in the outcome and trust result in meaningful increases in productivity and profitability.
- **Tugboat Institute**—'Evergreen Companies' last much longer, enjoy stronger job growth and contribute more to their communities. A study by Gary Kunkle helped isolate 50 traits of these companies, training the owners in their application. Most of these traits are business related (avoiding outside investments/debt), but many coincide with traits within this paper.
- **KKR (Pete Stavros and Jamil Zaki)**—Companies with empathetic owners and some employee ownership perform better than their peers. They have developed both an empathy test and an empathy boot camp for their portfolio companies.
- **Small Giants**—Bo Burlingham in his foundational book of same name isolated 7 traits of privately held companies that were both profitable and had prioritized greatness over scale.
- **Bob Chapman, CEO of Barry-Wehmiller and author of *Truly Human Leadership***—Wanted to see impact of acting like a steward, building a culture of trust, creating agency and employee development, and focusing on win-win on his business growth. Results?
  - » Barry-Wehmiller grew from roughly \$20 million in revenue in the 1970s to a multi-billion-dollar enterprise.
  - » The company achieved more than 18% annual compound returns to shareholders over decades according to an IE Business School case study.
  - » The organization expanded to roughly 12,000+ employees globally while maintaining its people-first philosophy.
- **Conscious Capitalism**—Raj Sisodia's book *Firms of Endearment* contained research finding that a portfolio of stakeholder-oriented companies dramatically outperformed the S&P 500 over long periods. These companies included Whole Foods (John Mackey co-founded Conscious Capitalism with Raj), Southwest Airlines (Herb Kelleher), Costco (James Sinegal), Patagonia (Yvon Chouinard), and Berkshire Hathaway (Warren Buffett). While critics debate whether the relationship is causal, the findings helped spark a large body of subsequent research exploring the links among trust, employee engagement, purpose, stakeholder orientation, and long-term business performance.

All of these studies show that operating with heart can have a meaningful positive impact on your bottom line and the well-being of everyone in your ecosystem. Jump in, the water's warm!

# PART X. THE CALLING

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Fatalism is the belief there's nothing you can do to make a difference. One of the messages prevailing in media today is that the only worthwhile ability you have in making society better is to vote for one party or another. That things will only get better if another side is defeated. This is the natural state of politics: if you believe that is the only chance you have of making things better, then a well-meaning person will do anything... give their fortunes... to helping with what seems a critically important cause. This message is very effective at raising money. And voting is important, politics is important. But in my opinion, especially for owners with significantly more influence within their ecosystems, I don't believe it's the most impactful difference you can make on society. What is fraying society isn't the other side. It's the loss of trust, it's the loss of agency, it's loss of connection, it's loss of community. These are all the things that make up the fabric of a healthy society and the very fabric business owners can help repair. It is a strategic choice that is profitable plus it's grounded in history, human resilience, and the possibility of renewal.

I didn't write this paper as an intellectual exercise. I wrote it to spark something inside of you.

As I imagine what it would have been like to sit in an Edinburgh pub with Adam Smith and David Hume, to look into their eyes and share our thoughts and our humanity; I also imagine what it's like to sit in a bar with you, my friend. To share a beer and state my case, as I have in this paper, to ask you to remember: you have a say in how this story ends.

You are the backbone of our economy, you employ over half of American workers, you are grounded in reality, you shape the culture of your ecosystem, you are embedded in your community, and you have the highest trust level of remaining institutions. People watch and listen to you.

Yet we're all vulnerable to one of the most dangerous lies of our age. That we are spectators to the future. The myth that only others with more power, prestige, credentials, followers, and money control what happens. That all we can do is vote every few years, complain intelligently, post occasionally, protect our family and hope the world doesn't slide into craziness before our kids inherit it.

I do not accept that. Human nature, faith, and history don't support it. And if you think back, your lived experience doesn't support it. Most of us can point to a teacher, coach, parent, mentor, pastor, employer, employee, friend or even a stranger whose act of courage and kindness changed the trajectory of our lives in ways they may not fully know. Some of the greatest cultural changes in history come from the accumulated acts of "we the people": civil rights, libraries, public education, pop culture. As I finish this paper during the 2026 World Cup, visitors from around the world are noticing that America's people are nothing like what is described on TV, falling in love with our culture. Hanging out in our bars. Going to our baseball games. Sharing a pint before the soccer match. This is the unspoken power that can be renewed, one at a time.

It's one pastor's sermon that can elevate the feelings of a congregation. One parent's admonition that can redirect the course of a child. One mentor's help that can renew lost hope in someone who's feeling forsaken. And one business owner who can elevate the people within their ecosystem.



***“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.”***

**–Dr. Margaret Mead**

It's why Margaret Mead's famous quote has always resonated with me so deeply. Dr. Mead was an anthropologist, studying changing cultures and human nature. Her clinical observation brings hope and the demand of agency. Good people can't idly sit by.

What we tolerate, reward, model, teach and embody all becomes culture. Your business isn't just a means of production, it is a culture-influencing organization. Not just the culture inside your business. That culture finds its way into the families of your workers and the community.

And business is where we spend most of our time. 2,000 hours a year times 65 million Americans is 130 billion hours a year Americans spend with closely held businesses! It's where we provide stability, where young people can learn responsibility, where customers can experience trust or manipulation, where communities receive jobs and civic leadership. Your business has more societal importance than most consider.

It doesn't mean every business needs to become a social movement. That's not the purpose of this paper, to create more performative movements. We've seen the impacts of polarized cancel culture efforts.

But your business is affecting people in some direction, whether you're deliberate about it or not. There is no neutral culture. It's not whether you're shaping people, it's how... and of course, does shaping them within the abundance flywheel structure align with your ability to make a profit? I believe the evidence is overwhelmingly YES.

The reasons now are important I think are obvious. AI is here and will only get better. If the last few years have separated us through screens, algorithms, institutional mistrust and the strange loneliness of being constantly 'connected', the years to come could reconnect us or separate us further depending on how we shape our direction. Passively being directed or actively with clear-eyed agency.

AI will be used in every area. It may cure diseases, accelerate innovation, improve productivity, reduce drudgery, expand access to education and allow businesses to do things once required by entire departments. But it does not have wisdom to lead us in the direction of flourishing.

Just like other technological innovations, AI will amplify the incentives, character and consciousness of the people using it. Humanity is being handed a superpower and it's up to all of us to grow into the task.

This is why sensemaking and discernment become so important. The more powerful our tools become, the more important it is that the people using them have developed more wisdom, character, courage, temperance, heart, and intuition. Otherwise, AI will be used only for maximizing efficiency and humans become an inefficiency to be replaced. Or worse, people will use AI for extractive reasons leaving humanity worse off.

A machine can summarize information, but it cannot determine what is sacred. A machine can optimize a process, but it cannot decide what should not be optimized. A machine can imitate empathy, but it cannot sit with an employee who just lost a spouse and actually feel sorrow for them. A machine can generate a beautiful sentence about love, but it cannot love your children. A machine can calculate tradeoffs, but it cannot carry the moral weight of laying someone off with dignity. A machine can produce a strategy deck about stewardship, but it cannot be a steward.

You live closer to reality than most institutions. You can't escape feedback for long. Customers leave. Employees quit. Cash runs out. Bad culture shows up in turnover. Bad products show up in complaints. Bad strategy shows up in numbers. Bad character eventually shows up everywhere. This doesn't make business owners perfect—far from it—but it does mean owners with skin in the game are trained, over time, to respect reality in ways that purely theoretical systems often forget.

*That kind of discernment will be desperately needed by everyone in your ecosystem.*

Even as AI has been thought of as favoring the largest organizations with the biggest budgets, it dramatically increases the capabilities of the small. The local business owner with judgment, trust, and proximity to customers can now wield capabilities once reserved for global corporations. Innovation has tended to emerge from the edges rather than the center. AI may accelerate that trend.

And you can teach it, not by preaching at people, but by modeling it. By showing what it looks like to use AI as a tool rather than a master. By showing what it looks like to make decisions with both data and judgment. By showing what it looks like to protect privacy, protect trust, and resist manipulation even when manipulation might be profitable. By showing what it looks like to use technology to make people more capable rather than more dependent.

*This is a serious responsibility and an extraordinary opportunity.*

Because the more synthetic the world becomes, the more valuable the truly human becomes. The more content is generated, the more valuable real voice becomes. The more intelligence becomes abundant, the more scarce wisdom becomes. The more relationships become transactional, the more valuable trust becomes. The more people feel managed by systems they cannot see, the more they will be drawn to leaders they can actually know.

**Heart is not becoming obsolete.**

**Heart is becoming the differentiator.**

**Heart is our most valuable asset.**

So, yes, build your AI strategy. Improve your systems. Automate what should be automated. Use the tools. Learn them before competitors use them against you. But do not confuse efficiency with flourishing, or intelligence with wisdom, or scale with meaning, or engagement with connection.

**The future does not need business owners who become more machine-like.**

**It needs business owners who become more fully human.**

This takes us back, oddly enough, to that pub in Edinburgh.

I imagine Smith and Hume sitting there with me, half amused by our modern tools and half horrified by our modern noise, watching us carry devices in our pockets containing more information than any empire in history while somehow struggling to talk to the person across the table. I imagine Smith reminding me again that, “man naturally desires not only to be loved, but to be lovely.” Not merely admired. Not merely followed. Not merely rich. Lovely. Worthy of love. Worthy of trust. Worthy of

respect. And I imagine Hume, with all his skepticism and brilliance and imperfection, reminding me that reason alone was never supposed to rule the whole human being.

The heart was always part of the architecture. We forgot. Or maybe we just got distracted.

Either way, we can remember.

And that remembering does not require permission from Washington, Wall Street, Silicon Valley, academia, media, or any other institution that may or may not deserve the trust it once held. It begins where you already stand. With your business. Your family. Your employees. Your customers. Your vendors. Your neighborhood. Your church or synagogue or mosque or temple or dinner table or morning walk or quiet moment before the workday begins.

That may sound too small, but it is not.

The world is repaired locally before it is repaired nationally. Trust is rebuilt one relationship at a time before it shows up in surveys. Culture is restored through repeated acts before it becomes visible in institutions. Hope returns when people see someone near them acting with courage, wisdom, competence, and love.

*Crown thy good with brotherhood—from sea to shining sea!  
This is not sentimental, it is how human beings work.*

The angry meme does not heal the world. The cynical commentary does not heal the world. The clever critique does not heal the world. Even being right does not heal the world if being right only makes us colder, angrier, and less able to see the humanity of the person in front of us.

**What heals is courage embodied.**

**Trust practiced.**

**Wisdom developed.**

**Agency reclaimed.**

**Love enacted.**

**Day after day.**

**Inside real lives.**

**Inside real businesses.**

**Inside real communities.**

So this is my call to you, my good friend and fellow business owner. Do not give in to fatalism. Do not outsource your judgment. Do not let AI, politics, media, fear, cynicism, or the constant drip of outrage convince you that your best days of influence are behind you or that your only meaningful role is to react to what others create.

*Develop yourself and build your abundance flywheel.  
And have some fun along the way.*

Because if this abundance thing becomes one more grim moral obligation, we've missed the point entirely. A business of abundance should feel more alive. More human. More trusting. More creative. More excellent. More resilient. More fun. Not perfect. Never perfect. But alive in the way a great jazz band is alive, listening and adjusting and laughing and recovering and finding moments of beauty nobody could have scripted in advance.

*The invisible hand was never only about prices.*

It was also a clue that when millions of people act with enough trust, courage, wisdom, and heart in the small domains entrusted to them, unseen patterns of abundance emerge that no central planner could ever design.

I don't know exactly what comes next, none of us do.

But maybe, if enough of us do this in enough places for enough time, our children will look back and wonder why we ever doubted that business owners with big hearts could help change the world. A little at a time.

This paper really began as I was walking through Edinburgh, thinking about both history and present, wanting to inspire businesses into hope, and seeing the statues. I even wrote near Smith's grave hoping to hear some of the old voices. It's up to the living to listen as the dead can only whisper.

As we celebrate the 250th anniversary of the Declaration, I hope we remember not only what America built, but what is asked of us.

So, to Adam Smith, David Hume, Soke Boyer, my dad and to all the imperfect humans before us who carried wisdom forward the best they could so we could remember to incorporate the old into the new, I raise one final glass.

*To heart.  
To courage.  
To trust.  
To big-hearted business.  
And to the business  
owners who feel the  
calling and decide to  
answer it.  
Slàinte mhath!*



*Adam Smith's grave - Edinburgh, Scotland*

The next section is my promise and what you can do today, if you are so moved.

# MY PROMISE AND WHAT YOU CAN DO TODAY

In the movie *The Sixth Sense*, young Cole claims to be able to see “dead people.” I have been blessed with being able to see “good people.” It’s not perfect, but I’ve kept a collection through the years of people I believe have their hearts in the right place and are excellent in their craft. So I have four promises:

- I will share a listing of these resources before end of August '26 for all to explore via my social media channels. I have no ownership, follow what makes you curious.
- I will create a decentralized community for like-minded people to connect. If your heart pulls you, please connect through one of my channels below.
- I am creating an app on website that will help you identify where you might want to learn and give you suggestions for people who can help. I receive no compensation for these referrals.
- I will be speaking on this topic for any groups who will listen. I am passionate believer that if we can tip over a few important dominoes, we can all make a huge difference.

If you want to be part of this conversation, please connect with me, the community and my Big-Hearted Business Owner newsletter and resources via [www.bigheartedbusinessowner.com](http://www.bigheartedbusinessowner.com) or [matt@mattpardieck.com](mailto:matt@mattpardieck.com).

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