

RUNGS *not* WRONGS



Steps for YOUR Career Ladder

Written by
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Completed on the
4th of July 2020

/=/ Dedicated to my family; \=
Mom, Patty, Rachael, and Bridget,
who allowed me to enjoy my career while
in balance with a great family life together.

Also dedicated to the many people
I had the pleasure of working with over the years.
I am happy we climbed our ladders together
and changed the world in our own way.

Thanks to my contributing editors
Rachael, Bridget, Lin, and Danette.

Note: I am not a professional writer or author, and this is my first book effort. You may (and probably will) come upon some errors that are part of my self-publishing process. Please understand and consider my messaging intent, not the mechanical failures.

RUNGS *not* WRONGS

Preface

I have thought of writing a book for years now. I could never really get around to it until the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 provided me with the needed time.

There are lots of books out there on self-improvement, business lessons, life lessons, you name it. Many of the books are written by individuals who have climbed mountains (literally and metaphorically). I have read a few over the years and in some cases, they helped me, in other cases, not so much.

I guess I'm less of a mountain climber, and more of a ladder type of guy. My career run was a good one, and I was able to find the right methods to help in my personal climb up my ladder. Now, I am at the point in my life where I believe I have reasonably valuable and simple feedback for younger people who are interested in experiential learning. Perhaps these observations will help you as well.

I have mentored many people; students, exiting military, family, friends, and businesspeople. Writing this book is my proactive and scaled effort at mentoring and sharing my observations to help people and organizations succeed.

RUNGS *not* WRONGS is a book about my experience in life and business with the realization that my career ladder is of a different scale and height than others. My career ladder is what represented my life and career, and not to be compared with giants of industry, governments, philanthropy, and more.

My hope is that these thoughts give you something to reflect on and apply in your career. Your mountain is unique, but maybe some of what you read will help extend your own ladder.

If I can do it, so can you!
Dan Bell's 45+ year career ladder.
The result: Far more wins than losses.



Career Snapshot

Mechanic + Welder + Honeywell (Tech) + Diablo (Sup) + Apple (Sup to Mgr. to Regional Mgr.) + 21st Century Solutions (Founder/Partner) + Laser (Director) + Elec Tek (Sr. Director) + US Robotics (VP) + 3Com (SVP to Global SVP) + Canon ITS (SVP to Pres). Now semi-retired and leading a regional technology council and city business group.

Community and board work in the Hampton Roads, VA Region

President, Hampton Roads Technology Council, President, Future of Hampton Roads, Lead Hampton Roads, Civic Leadership Institute, Habitat for Humanity South Hampton Roads, Opportunity Inc., Hampton Roads Partnership, Hampton Roads Chamber of Commerce, Hampton Roads Business Education Collaborative, Chesapeake Technology Business Consortium, General Advisory Committee member VA Beach Schools Career and Technical Education, Virginia Supportive Housing Project, Virginia Conflict Resolution Center of Norfolk, Chesapeake Economic Development Authority, Hampton Roads Regional Council, Chesapeake Alliance, Montero Medical Missions, Chesapeake Crime Prevention Council, Chesapeake Citizen's Police Academy, Federal Bureau of Investigation Citizens Academy, Homeowner Association President, contributing writer to local newspapers.

Hobbies: Old cars, motorcycles, trying to stay healthy.

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This is my personal story with observations and experiences.
Please accept these vignettes as food for thought and reflection.
Who knows? Maybe it will help you climb your own ladder.

Section 1 /=/ Remember Your Roots \=\

Dad was John “Johnny” D’Arca, of Italian descent and an entertainer. In fact, he launched into show business with the help of Bob Hope, who he met while serving in the Army and stationed in the Philippines during WWII. Hope used to come to the war zones with the USO to entertain the troops. He would ask the crowd if anyone knew how to sing, dance, or tell jokes. Dad could sing and tell jokes, so his friends pushed him up on stage. He impressed Hope who offered to get Johnny started in show business if he made it home.

While Johnny was in the Philippines, he suffered from malaria, which weakened his heart. The Army medevacked him out right before his brigade was captured in the fall of Bataan. Johnny missed the Death March, so I guess there was a chance I would have never been here to live my life and tell these stories.

Johnny made it home and looked up Bob Hope, who made good on his promise. Hope gave him a start in show business, and he began traveling the country. His act was “D’Arca and Gee, the Long and Short of Melody and Mirth”. Johnny was 5’6” and his partner, Parker Gee was about 6’6” (hence the name “Long and Short”). Parker fed the straight lines. Dad was the comedian, who also had a beautiful operatic tenor singing voice.

While on the road, Dad met my mom, Vera “Ronnie” DiMito (half Italian, half Spanish descent), who was a dancer, also in the traveling shows. Mom never knew her own father, and her mother went off to earn a living, choosing to leave Mom to stay in the care of several foster homes, to whom she sent money. They eventually reunited when my mom was getting married to Johnny. Mom never complained and learned to look out for others, which she did her entire life.

Johnny and Ronnie got married and had my older brother Rick, then me (10½ months later). We didn’t have much in those days, and in fact, we lived in a very small 24’ camping trailer in Niles, IL until I was five years old. I remember ice on the inner walls in the wintertime and having to bundle up to stay warm. I remember the dirt roads in the trailer park. I even remember our

first animal rescue. We saw some mean kids kicking a box and heard a cat inside it. We stopped them, saved, and adopted Ming, our first pet (who lived to be 21 years old). Solid character builders.

Since Johnny was in show business, he traveled all the time, so I have only a few memories of him. When I was five, we eventually moved to Rolling Meadows, IL where we enjoyed a great childhood with a school nearby, friends, church, and community. That all changed one Saturday morning when I was seven. I awoke to the sound of my mother in tears, being consoled by neighbors and clergy. My dad died of a heart attack while entertaining in Detroit. Johnny had experienced at least two prior heart attacks. This one got him. As a traveling entertainer, he ate three squares a day in restaurants serving food cooked in lard (common for the 1950s). He was a social drinker and smoker too. That combined with a bad ticker, his fate was sealed.

Life was tough for my mom for several years as we had even less than we had before. She worked two jobs, led a Cub Scout Den (where I started with Scouts, then going on to Boy Scouts), and taught dance classes. She made ends meet and even prioritized taking us kids to see the country on car road trips. Prior to Dad's death, Mom did not even have a driver's license. She knew what she had to do, and got it done.

Over the course of my career, I have worked with people at many levels. Some from humble beginnings like mine, some from more fortunate ones. I always appreciated the people who were able to overcome adversity to achieve a competitive position in work. That does not make them better people per se; they just overcame a deficit, defied odds, and succeeded.

On the contrary, it is disappointing when some feel the need to brag about their status, lifestyles, or credentials to make themselves appear better than others. I much prefer those who are unpretentious and exhibit humility. The sad truth is, as well-known doctor and author Deepak Chopra puts it, "Humility isn't a quality our society often applies to success, since it doesn't sit well with other qualities--drive, ambition, ruthlessness, competitive fierceness--that are equated with success all the time."

Section 1 /=/ My Ladder Lessons \=

My dad was a good provider. Even though he travelled all the time, Johnny made sure his family was well taken care of. I learned to appreciate that as I got older and made sure I took care of my family.

I learned a lot from my mom's tenacity. She did what she had to do without making enemies along the way. She worked hard, was active in the community as a dance instructor, scout leader and entrepreneur. She was very well-liked by everyone, all the while getting things done. I think my drive and tenacity was inherited from mom.

I never lost sight of my roots throughout my career. Every time I advanced, I remembered those icy trailer walls, where I came from, and my family and friends along the way. I never wanted to think I was above anyone else because I was not.

Deficits can happen early in our childhood, but do not have to stop us or send us in a bad direction. Though it can if you're not careful.

People should be valued in part for what they have overcome. It is a demonstration of their resiliency and ability to work beyond early disadvantages.

Stay grounded and relate to everyone. Not just those who you think are worthy of you in your opinion.

Remember that what goes up can also come down.

Section 2 /=/ **Smarts vs. Education** \=\

I am not a highly educated person. To this day, I think my vocabulary could be much better. I cannot sit down and do high level math or science like my kids can. Yet my IQ has been tested and it is considered high. One of the companies I was an executive for thought it was a good idea to test the IQs of all their senior leaders. Maybe the person who came up with that idea should have been tested too. Mine tested higher than many, and it surprised the person who coordinated the testing. It pays to look stupid sometimes, I guess. Then it's more fun when you exceed their expectations.

I was a decent student through grade school and even into high school. The problem was that I fell in with the wrong crowd. They were called girls. My dating life took priority over studies and I faked it through school to the point where I had to work at McDonald's to make up credits. But that didn't turn out badly. I met Ray Kroc who put me in a Mac's commercial, and I met one of my best friends in life, Joe.

On the heels of barely graduating high school, I went on to college; specifically, DeVry Tech in Chicago. I was doing well there for a while until I was introduced to some seniors from Madonna High School (all girls). Here I go again, and I barely graduated college. I left DeVry with a technician diploma, which was enough to get a job in the field. Ten years later, once my feet were steady in my career, I would achieve a BA in Applied Behavioral Science from National Louis University. That's all the higher ed I achieved.

After DeVry, I went on to apply for my first job out of college. During an interview with Honeywell, I managed to smoothly steer the conversation away from being a 'C' student to the kind of cars I worked on. Ironically, the guy interviewing me was a gearhead (I could tell by his hands which were beat up looking). We told each other car stories and the next thing you know; I was hired as a Quality Control Technician. My upward journey began here. I was relieved that I got my first technician job. Whew! The rest was on me to prove myself.

A few rungs and years later, while working in junior leadership at Apple Computer, I asked the site director for a personal conversation on my advancement opportunities. I was doing OK but wanted to do better. He wasn't a fan of mine, because he was told to hire me by the execs in California who met me first, and I wasn't degreed. Our relationship was difficult ever since. Back to our conversation about my advancement. I'm not kidding when I say that this guy told me "Bell, you're going nowhere." Wow, what a gut punch! He went on to say my ego wall was "dumb." My ego wall was where I hung the various certificates from external leadership, speaking, team building, you name it, programs meant to improve myself. I worked hard at self-improvement and my ego wall helped remind me to use what I learned. That guy might have benefitted from building his own dumb ego wall.

After that conversation, I thought about leaving Apple since it was obvious, he would block my advancement. Instead, I decided to double-down. I worked even harder and got an accelerated bachelor's degree where I wrote and wrote and wrote and presented and presented and presented on my work and life experiences. I was the only student using a computer (I used an Apple ///), and believe it or not, was the only student to graduate on time. To the dismay of that site director, I was acknowledged by Apple Computer and gave a speech on smarts and education being two entirely different things.

Sometime after that, Steve Jobs decided to visit our site. The site director wanted to video Jobs while he was speaking to the management team. Jobs didn't like being recorded, so the director instructed one of our techs to hide a video camera in the adjacent kitchenette to discretely videotape Jobs. A risky plan no doubt as Jobs had an explosive temper and was very quick to fire people on the spot if he did not like what he was seeing. Jobs got most of the way through his remarks but then noticed the red record LED light on the camera. His reaction was "WHAT THE F@#\$ IS THAT?", as he pointed toward the camera. The tech was frozen in his steps but had the presence of mind to point to the site director and say, "He told me to do it!" That was the one and only time Jobs visited us.

For whatever reason, that site director was eventually terminated for being, shall we say, less than directorship material.

Though he was highly educated, he wasn't very smart or at least didn't exhibit good judgement at that time.

Common sense and good judgement such as reading people, knowing the material, taking advantage of opportunities, and doing well with people are huge components of success. This may include higher education or may not.

I have mentored some of the best college students in my area and have always told them to get their degrees, so they are not at a disadvantage. I go on to say that the diploma alone will not carry them. They must exhibit other characteristics to the employer to get ahead of the pack; ambition, teamwork, work skills, communication skills, computer skills, and as many 21st Century job skills as they can get. Those, along with some work experience is the best combination.

Internships are a well-known technique for gaining experience and developing an early relationship with an organization; sometimes they are paid, sometimes not. Employers greatly value the balance of education and experience and internships help you get that mixture in a company environment.

Managing relationships not only at an organization, but also within a professional network is critical for upward career mobility. Leveraging connections inside an organization are one of the best ways into a company. My advice is always to write out "Who do you know?" "Where do they work?" "Can they get your application pulled out of the stack?"

Let me also talk about the trades in a very positive way. I worked as a mechanic and welder, and before that did electrical and plumbing work in my early years and made a good living with it. My ambition was more towards the high-tech world, but trades are a wonderful way to make a living and we certainly need everything they do. I respect and admire trades very much.

Another best friend is Steve, who I have known since 5th grade. Steve did not graduate high school, but joined the Marines, learned to work on airplanes, got out, and started his own custom body and paint shop. Eventually, he started focusing on old Rolls Royce and Bentley automobiles.

Fortunately for him, Steve became one of the best in this line of work, gaining customers from around the country for his restorations. It is amazing to see the combination of mechanical and artistic skills applied to cars that are award-winning in shows.

Joe (who I mentioned earlier) and I met in our high school McDonald's work program. He does have a high school diploma, but never went to college. Rather, Joe immersed himself into the machinist trade and works on prototype cash-tending machines that incorporate all the current advanced manufacturing technologies and super precise engineering, as you can imagine.

Then there's my brother Rick who at one point I called a professional student. Rick pursued clinical psychology and got his bachelors, masters and eventually a PHD (over years and years). In addition to his academic achievements, he is a very smart guy too. I am jealous of his musical talent. When we were young, mom had us take piano and guitar lessons. I never continued with it, but Rick did and can play today (drums too). I give him a great deal of credit, even for his singing in a barbershop quartet.

I have many friends in the Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO) of southeast VA. These are founders, owners, presidents, and CEOs of a variety of businesses (tech and non-tech). Many of these people have succeeded with degrees, but many are non-degreed. It is all circumstantial as to whether their careers involved a college education. Yet, I can tell you these are some very smart people.

Make no mistake, I am an advocate of higher education because it separates you from the field in highly competitive times. The job market is challenging, with employers receiving hundreds of applications for one job. A degree may not be 100% needed, but it may be a prerequisite for being noticed.

These stories simply illustrate that you can be successful both with and without higher level education. It depends on what field you want to get into. If you're in the trades, you might not need a bachelor's degree vs. the vocational skills training you need. If you're in white collar, a degree may be a prerequisite unless you have such great experience and sometimes inside contacts to help get your candidacy reviewed.

Section 2 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Education is different than common sense and street smarts. The combination of all is best.

Demonstrate some savvy, presence, and awareness.

Realize that in addition to your degree, work experience and soft skills (teamwork, problem solving, communication skills and more) are very important to hiring managers and for your advancement. 21st Century Job Skills.

Higher education is not a guarantee for success. It can help get you in the door though.

Education and experience should always be considered. Remember that you must get past the HR Rep before the hiring manager sees you.

Though you might have your education credentials or work experience, remember that leveraging connections inside an organization are one of the best ways into a company. Who do you know? Where do they work? Can they get your application pulled out of the stack? Good references help.

Endorse the trades. They make a great living and provide much needed services to us all.

If in the trades, become great at what you do with vocational skills training.

Use electrical tape to cover the red LED.

Section 3 /=/ **Work Hard & Exceed** \=\

Mom raised my brother and me and carried on by herself for a few years after my dad died, until she met Jim Bell. Jim and his family owned the Chicago Tribune, Sun Times, News, and American distribution rights for the suburbs of Arlington Heights and Rolling Meadows IL.

Mom wanted Rick and me to learn a good work ethic, so she got us paper routes when we were young. I have worked since I was eight years old, Rick was nine. We delivered papers through rain, snow or shine, seven days a week. That is how mom, Rick and I met Jim, who would deliver the papers in bulk to our home. I will never forget Jim rolling up in his fire-engine red '63 split window Corvette coupe, even though I was too young to appreciate it as I do now. Eventually, mom and Jim got married, and he legally adopted me and Rick giving us his legal name (Bell). He and mom also had three more kids: Dave, Debbie, and Brian.

Rick and I worked at the news agency during our high school years. This was not easy, as we had 2 a.m. start times, then 1-2 hours of sleep before going to school. We were involved in sports as well making it even more difficult. We got through it, although academically it hurt me. I barely made it out of high school in four years (thanks McDonald's work credits program). The agency taught us a hard work ethic, that's for sure. It stuck for life. Jim taught me toughness, and how to work hard. He would also show me what a bad husband and failed business owner was like. He lost everything to alcohol, including his life.

Think of a good-looking guy who was as charismatic as he could be. Jim's problem was that he was genetically coded to like beer. I have never seen anyone guzzle it like I saw him do, yet he thought you couldn't be an alcoholic on beer. He was like a dehydrated person coming off the desert. He had everything going for him and lost it all, including my mom. Their marriage lasted about six years, ending in divorce and abandonment of my mom and their three kids. Those were tough times which took its toll on all our family.

After the divorce, Mom had to work multiple jobs again to make ends meet. She had an entrepreneurial spirit and converted our garage to a dance studio. She also converted an outside small barn into Creative Cabin, an artsy consignment store. Mom worked hard. Rick and I were high school age, so upon graduation, Rick went to college and never looked back. I moved on a couple years later. Rick would eventually change his legal name back to D'Arca. Sometimes I regret not doing so as well.

Mom raised her three young children alone, then even raised four grandchildren as my half-sister could not be a present mother at the time. Mom never complained, doing everything she could do to give them a good life, even though she was retirement age. All the while, she kept working hard. She never retired.

Jim died young at 50, in Albuquerque, NM of alcoholism-related complications and was virtually homeless. Mom went on to make 89 years old. She could have gone longer, but died of complications from pneumonia, which she contracted in the hospital after getting her hip replaced successfully. She had a heart valve replaced earlier that year and could have made it to 100 I'm sure, with her tenacity. Mom worked all the way through until she faltered.

I picked up my work ethic from my mom and Jim and have worked hard at every position I have ever held. Hard work means putting in the time, making the effort, and learning the ropes. I also learned from Jim how drinking to excess was not for me.

Sometimes putting in the time meant working overtime, at home, or a hybrid. As an example, I remember taking my daughters to work at Apple on Saturdays and letting them play school in the conference room for hours while I put in the extra time. I would leave their work on the whiteboard for coworkers to see on Monday morning. It gave us all a chuckle. Putting in the extra time either during the work week or on the weekend was very common for me to do. I wanted to make sure all programs were running, and new ideas documented and submitted to corporate for review. It was fun to have my kids there whenever I could, and they enjoyed it. By the way, my oldest daughter Rachael went on to be a teacher.

At Honeywell as a quality control tech, I didn't say I'd ship 40 panels a day, I said I'd ship as much as I could and try to exceed expectations. At that time, 10-15 were the norm. That performance is what got me promoted to Lab Supervisor (rungs 1 and 2 of my corporate ladder).

While at Diablo Systems as a bench tech, then Supervisor, I didn't say I'd increase service revenues and customer satisfaction beyond their expected improvements desired. Our branch exceeded that expectation by 20% (rungs 3 and 4 of my corporate ladder).

While at Apple Computer, I started as a Repair Center Supervisor and did well, advanced to Training Manager and did well, advanced to Tech Support Manager and did well, advanced to Regional Manager and did well. I didn't say that I would create the best regional team in the company and innovate great solutions. I hired great people like Bill, Kirk, Chris, Bernie, Gary, Terry, and more. We developed a great team, and success fostered more success like a positive domino effect (rungs 5 through 8 of my corporate ladder).

When I helped launch and grow 21st Century Solutions (with members of the former Apple team), we didn't think we would explode to the level of sales we achieved (rung 9 of my corporate ladder).

At other stops along the way; Laser Computer (rung 10), Elek-Tek (rung 11), US Robotics and 3Com (rungs 12, 13, 14, 15), all the way through Canon (rungs 16, 17, 18), we didn't think we would be rated #1 in our areas, but we were (rung 16 to the top of my corporate ladder). Our Canon Information Technology Services (CITS) operations were recognized by Canon globally and used as the example to be followed.

All my modest achievements were a result of the hard work of great people and teams, who were motivated and inspired to achieve higher levels, sprinkled with innovation, loyalty, and recognition. We exceeded all expectations together.

Section 3 /=/ My Ladder Lessons \=

As a young man, I learned what physical work was all about. That carried into sports and life. Hard work, within reason, is good for your body and soul. Don't be afraid to challenge yourself both mentally and physically.

I would push myself to carry more, move faster, outperform the competition. In my career, I applied some of the same techniques to seek and achieve over-performance.

Over-performance doesn't have to be only physical. It can be mental as well.

Work hard, solve problems organizationally, creatively, and with innovation and the efforts of your team.

There's an old saying; "Under promise and over deliver." In my experience, I would want to set reasonable expectations and then over-perform them.

Exceeding all expectations is a great sensation to achieve when delivering on subjects like higher customer satisfaction, lower costs, and higher employee satisfaction.

It takes hard work and a great team to achieve organizational excellence. I have found that if you provide opportunities to excel, add guidance and rewards, you can do great things together.

Sometimes you must set the pace and show others what your vision is, so direction and expectations are set correctly.

Under promise and overdeliver whenever you can.

Section 4 /=/ Lead by Example \=\

While working at the news agency, my brother Rick and I were never asked to do anything that the Bells (the owners) would not do themselves. There was Paul (the patriarch), Gwen (the matriarch), George, Peg, Jim, Fred, and Judy. That Bell family was tough as nails and worked as hard as anyone else. They would show you HOW they wanted things done by doing it themselves, expecting you to observe, learn and do.

Certainly, in high school, the best coaches I had were the ones who demonstrated how to do things. I will never forget my two favorite high school football coaches. Coach Phillips was the lineman coach and taught us great technique (including teaching me how to throw a mean elbow). Coach Lussow taught us how to run fast backward (to cover defensively), by his lining up on the 10 yard line (us on the goal line), then blew the whistle to run the length of the field backward, seeing if any of us could catch him. No one did.

In college, the professors were the ones who could show you how to solve problems. I had a great relationship with Professor Bansaff. It began when he approached our classroom and I was smoking a cigarette (don't worry, I quit decades ago), in the hallway under the No Smoking sign. He said, "Hey Bell, can't you read?" I looked up and responded with "I thought that was the professor's name Nosmo King". He smiled, asked me to put it out and we got along great ever since. He taught me a great deal. In work, good managers and leaders show you how to get projects done. Like many, I am someone who likes when a person visually demonstrates how to do something.

My first job out of college was at Honeywell where we were responsible for producing environmental control, security, fire protection, and building management systems to be installed in buildings around the world. I started in the data gathering panel (DGP) group where we verified operations of these panels that would eventually match up to the central processing units.

When I came in, I was trained by Larry (The Legend) who showed me the ropes in understanding the technology of the

panels. Once I got the hang of it, I would crank out (test and approve) 30-40 panels a day when others were doing half that amount. Coworkers saw what I did and wanted to perform at the same level. If I could do it, so could they. Eventually, our department was over-performing in all areas, and I was promoted to Lead Tech, eventually advancing onward from there.

At times, my hard work ethic led to resentment from some colleagues. Resentment is a reaction to be expected because it is a human emotion. The way I overcame that was just to be as friendly and supportive as I could to those who felt I was showing them up. I worked hard on the human relations side to overcome their emotion of resent. Sometimes it works, sometimes it does not. You can't win them all.

I then worked in the Central Processing Unit (CPU) lab where we verified operations on the big brain boxes (in 6'x4'x3' chassis). I worked my way to Lead Tech there as well and was sent on road trips to troubleshoot and repair field installations. I will never forget my first field trip. It was to a hospital for the clinically insane, and the area I had to go into was for the criminally insane. Let your imaginations run wild. I had to go through intense security measures, locked double-door entrance ways, unbreakable glass, and security guards at my side to access the panel. I remember the guards' sense of humor as I heard the door close, looked over and saw them grinning and waving while I was alone in there. There's a comical figure of speech; "Feet don't fail me now." I wanted to run out of there fast. That experience started my business travel days as I went all over the country into various cities, colleges, and jails and eventually internationally. I always delivered on getting the systems running and worked hard to build my reputation while in the field.

In one operation, we were responsible for testing large central processing units that controlled primary building (including control tower) activities for the FAA (Federal Aviation Association). Our process was to insert about 200 circuit boards, power it on, run tests to ensure all systems were good, place a heat bag over it and let them operate in heat (bake) for 24 hours. This was followed by another series of tests out of heat. If good, we'd

demo it to the FAA inspector, stamp it as 100% verified, log it, and ship it. All very controlled due to the FAA.

One of our guys decided he would create a process that worked better for him, essentially skipping the preliminary testing phase, inserting the cards, turning the system on, and not testing its operation. Since I was the Lead, I asked why he was doing it that way and his response was that it was easier for him. I explained any circuits replaced after heat never had the opportunity to bake and prove their operational capability under stress. He wasn't happy, but we had to show the right example for the entire tech staff, so that we didn't have a flawed process followed by anyone. I had to lead by example, and I did.

At one job, when I was new, I told my boss I was thinking about buying a new Corvette Anniversary Edition. He thought those were great cars, then asked me to look in the parking lot. He said most people just want to be safe and comfortable and cannot afford anything like that. "Do you want to be the guy parking your new Corvette at work where people can't afford anything like that?" I really wanted that car but didn't buy it. I agreed, it would set a bad example.

Leading by example involves good judgment and is a prerequisite for success that should be applied everywhere. Make good decisions, demonstrate you know what you are doing, and ask for input and feedback. Demonstrate that good judgement is part of your character and expect the same from your team.

No one is perfect. I have learned much along the way and made my share of mistakes. The attributes I learned early on in my career followed me through corporate America. Every job position presents the opportunity for hard work, leadership, and good character.

Let's also remember that you are a walking, talking example for your family and friends. You illustrate how it is going. Are you in your stride? Are you struggling? I have seen many who took their work issues home with them and their family paid the price. Leading by example carries all the way through to home.

Section 4 /=/ My Ladder Lessons \=

When I started in business, I always wanted to lead. Maybe I picked it up from my mom. I wanted to show how it's done, inspire others to succeed, and deliver.

I learned from people and got motivated by examples set for me.

Throughout my career, I found it best to demonstrate and lead by doing and demonstrating.

I have always tried to find ways to inspire people in my own way, by rolling up my sleeves whenever I could and working side-by-side.

I remained open-minded to let better ideas come forward.

If in leadership, learn to not do it yourself but inspire and instruct others to do so.

Make good decisions, demonstrate you know what you are doing, and ask for feedback.

Realize that sometimes you can unintentionally outshine someone into increasing their performance. Be careful how you handle the relationship.

As a leader, you are measured by your team's accomplishments.

Positive leadership in work and personal life is the best way.

You might have to pass on the Corvette.

Section 5 /=/ **Honesty & Integrity** \=\

There are always ways to win the wrong way. In my career, I have seen creative accounting, creative sales, creative returns management, and creative team building. I have seen attempted creativity in a bad way. Departments and companies can lose. People can lose. Reputations can get damaged. In my opinion, it is not worth cheating the system. It is wrong and you get caught.

I have seen very senior people come crashing down based on bad decisions that compromised their honesty and integrity. At one company, I saw senior executives dismissed because of intentionally allowing incorrect return processing that helped his divisional sales numbers, or even inappropriate relationships with subordinates.

One day at Apple, I got a call from the FBI (out of the blue). The bureau had conversations with Apple HQ and wanted to get my assistance in breaking up a counterfeit Apple network. It appears that people were getting circuit boards and matching them to fake Apple cases. I thought it was funny when I asked them how I would find them when I got off the plane. They said, "Don't worry, we'll find you." I met them in Detroit (yes, they found me), and they took me to a warehouse where I identified these were real Apple boards stolen from Apple locations then placed in cases which were made internationally and smuggled in via commercial airline pilots.

In another company several years later, we found out that we had a bad international director who owned a bar/brothel in a foreign land, where we had operations. Many of us travelled internationally there for business and we would typically gather for dinner. He would then make the offer to take us out on the town. I sensed bad karma and never went, but some guys did, and he would bring them to his place. Unfortunately for them, their misdeeds were video recorded and used by the director for blackmail against them.

My brother Rick worked as a psychologist inside the Ohio penal system. He would tell me from time to time that many of the inmates were brilliant people, who created elaborate plans and

schemes to get rich quick. All it takes is one person in the chain to talk and plans would go sideways, putting people in jail.

I saw a neighbor who had a great job decide he wanted more. He got into drugs, dealing stolen car parts, robbery, fraud and eventually murder. He was on a good path but veered off. Possibly for greed, his horrifically bad judgement took a life, ruined a great life and sadly, others as well.

When we were building our house, I did the wiring myself for the intercom, speaker, video, and internet. The day of the electrical inspection came, and I met the inspector who had already red tagged my house. I was stunned and learned the county codes were different than the municipality code. I was so dejected that I thrust my hands into my pocket at which point the inspector firmly said, "Don't you try to bribe me. I don't accept bribes, and many have tried." I immediately turned my pockets inside out to show that I had \$5 on me. I added, "Sir, I couldn't if I wanted to." We went on to have a great conversation, talking about his experience, and mine. After chatting for an hour, he removed the red tag and said, "It's a technicality. You're fine."

We have all seen people in the news who are high-level politicians, owners, you name it, go weird and do things that they clearly should not have done. I always ask myself what they were thinking of? When is enough, enough? Why risk so much for so little?

I had several opportunities to cross the line. Trading confidential information for sex or money, taking kickbacks for buying decisions, even being offered a very large stock purchase opportunity for a product we used that was going public. I knew it was wrong (insider and conflict of interest stuff) and declined the chance to make a great sum.

On a lesser note, I recall taking a few shortcuts to get by in my day. I cheated on a couple tests, copied a paper, and did minor things that I now regret. To this day, I am ashamed of those things, but I am happy that at least there was only a small number of low-level infractions when I was a young person. I think I worked to be a better person, work harder, and earn whatever success I could get.

As you see, I have made much smaller mistakes early in my career that I am not proud of, though I learned to walk a straight line which has paid off for me. I learned, applied, and succeeded. You can too. Just learn from the mistakes that you make, or those of others. Hopefully, your mistakes are not serious ones, but learn in any way you can.

I have seen personal lives ruined and families destroyed because of a lack of honesty and integrity. A momentary lapse in judgement can be costly. I try to tell people to always focus on doing the right thing, even if it hurts. If you don't know for sure, ask someone you trust and who can advise you. Sometimes you just need to walk away and tell yourself you did the right thing. Better things will happen for you if you walk in the light.

I can't exit this section without a comical story about bending the rules. One time we were meeting at a bank HQ in the CEO's conference room. He was one of the senior statesmen in the region. Right before we walked out of the room, he entered and with an old southern drawl said "What y'all doing here boys?" I responded with the name of our organization and that it was a strategy session. Another senior statesmen was part of our organization (not present at that meeting) and the CEO said, "Is that sumbitch Ed still with y'all?" "Yes sir, he is." I replied. The CEO went on to tell us a story about when they were both high school football coaches' decades earlier and a big game between their two rival teams was coming up. The CEO told us how our guy Ed (a big school system superintendent) turned the water sprinkler system on and saturated the field so that when the game was played, the CEO's star running back couldn't run and cut like they thought he would, which was their great disadvantage. The CEO concluded "That sumbitch Ed won the game that day, he's a smart old cuss." Turns out they were very best friends and when I later told Ed about the exchange, he just smiled and said "He tells that story all the time and the outcome of the game changes each time he tells it."

Section 5 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

The old cliché is “do the right thing”. I fully believe in that.

Earn your success with honesty and integrity.

No one is perfect and we all make mistakes. If you make a mistake, make the correction, learn from it, and move forward.

Keep your mistakes small.

When I was a kid, I watched Romper Room and remember the “Do Bee or Don’t Bee” segment. Choose to be a Do Bee”:

- **Don’t be the person who fudges the numbers.**
- **Don’t be the person who uses company resources as your own.**
- **Don’t be the person to break the rules to enable your success.**
- **Don’t be the person who takes personal liberties with others.**
- **Don’t be the person who uses people for your advantage then discards them.**
- **Don’t be the person who thinks they can get rich quick.**

Your reputation will become known and be associated with your persona. Let that persona be a positive one and one that people admire.

Sometimes you can run the sprinklers and it’s OK.

Section 6 /=/ Positive Relationships \=\

I have usually been able to do well with people. I have mixed well, never got in too many fights, had a good number of friends. Maybe it's just the way I was born and wired.

My mom used to tell me that even when I was in the crib, I was easy-going and seldom cried. I guess it was just my temperament. She also used to tell me that I was just like my dad, John D'Arca. Dad came from a high-spirited Italian family who would often get into loud verbal arguments. Johnny was always the peacemaker, the calm voice of reason and the person who would settle the family down.

In business, I have gotten along well with people most of the time, as a peer or as a leader. I have taken all the personality tests showing Amiable/Driver always as strong elements for me. Creating and maintaining relationships is highly important to me; the personal connection is critical to thrive in life. This can mean being social outside of work. I will never forget when I got the news from my wife that she was pregnant with our first child. I was so excited I shared the information at work with people who I supervised. They took me out to lunch where we celebrated perhaps a bit too much. Memories were made and we were bonded by that lunch.

My wife and I would entertain and throw parties at our house, invite staff, and have a great time. While it is a must to maintain a degree of separation if you are a leader, that does not mean you cannot mix with the team. To this day, I still get together with people that I have worked with from the 80s and 90s and beyond. Even my closest personal friends date back to the 5th grade (Steve) and high school (Joe and our friend Carl). We are friends for life and still hang out together when I'm back in Chicagoland.

Please realize that I never held myself as better than anyone, just because I achieved high levels in business (remembering my roots). Many of my friends are fantastic artists, mechanics, machinists, and more. I always admire others' skills, being experts in their fields, as I was in mine.

I met Danette (who helped edit my work) in the mid-80s at Apple. The company had to rollout a new dealer service program with service exchange kits, or core returns, somewhat like auto parts. We teamed up to create a presentation, working on it for weeks together and then letting our regional managers around the country deliver it to the dealer service people. Danette and I are friends to this day almost 35 years later and still get together from time to time. Another special call-out for Bill. One of the first people I hired at Apple and solid friends still. Friends for life.

When at US Robotics and 3Com, I hired many of the people I had worked with in previous roles (I talk about that in the Loyalty section). I also had the opportunity to meet many new friends internationally. Probir was in the UK with great people like Lilly, Taj and more. Ross is in Australia and we are still friends.

When we moved from Chicago to Chesapeake in 2003, I had to re-establish a friend network in my new area. Over the years I met Jenn, Alex, Christine, and Dave. All very close friends still.

In 2011, I co-founded the Chesapeake Technology Business Council with some other high-tech leaders in the area. To this day I have maintained those friendships with one person standing way out. Brad runs his own tech company and we have been close friends ever since.

There are few people in my life or career that I have just refused to have a relationship with, if there seemed little chance of it evolving into a positive experience. In other cases, there are some people who are just more challenging, and I will say that applying forgiveness is sometimes in order (which may go both ways).

A quick note about good relationship maintenance. Nowadays it is easy to let politics get between and even damage good relationships due to the passion people have in their beliefs. I have had my share of engagement in political discussions and found that they become unhealthy. Remember the three things you might not want to talk about are religion, politics, and money. I try to curb my enthusiasm so that I can maintain positive relationships with friends and family.

Section 6 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

You will rarely be able to do everything alone. You'll need your team, your friends, and your family to succeed in life.

Maintaining relationships Is not always easy; they take effort. You get out what you put in.

Positive relationships help you to maintain the human connection we all need. That's how we are wired.

I live by the golden rule, treating people as I would want to be treated.

Humor was always a big component of my relationships with people. I was always comical in a good way which I probably picked up from my father Johnny. I think people appreciate the relaxed, fun environment.

Curb your enthusiasm and bite your tongue sometimes. It pays off in the long run.

Don't burn bridges, build them.

Don't burn friends, maintain them.

Be accessible to your friends to keep the connection strong.

Remember that your high-quality friends won't be a large number. It will be a smaller, tighter knit group.

Section 7 /=/ **Fiscal Responsibility** \=\

As one climbs their ladder, budgetary responsibility is often part of your scope. With my first budget experience, I was amazed that I had dollars available to hire people, purchase stuff, fund programs, and other associated business activity.

It took a while for me to get used to the idea and all too often, the finance person would run reports that showed I was under budget. I would hear, "You have x number of people you can hire. You have x number of dollars you are not using." This was all new to me.

A little course correction was in store for me as I learned leadership. The correction was called planning, defined as creating a strategic plan with a tactical deployment plan. This does not mean build a plan to spend your money. It means create a plan that uses money to advance your strategy. Then you must sell the message to get the funding.

I remember a time when I wanted to get \$5,000 for a plan and it had to come out of the marketing department's budget. I visited with the Director of Marketing who was supportive of my plan. Important to note that his past job was huge at a major international company. He heard what I had to say, then asked me how many dollars were needed. I told him \$5,000 to which he said, "Bell, I spill more than that every morning with coffee."

I got that money and it showed me that I should not be afraid to ask for what I needed, if I had a good plan. I spent it like it was my own. During my career, the organizations I was in achieved great things and always stayed on budget. I asked for the funding with the necessary plans and as far as I could recall, got those funds.

At a much later time in my career (toward the end of my corporate America run), I was with an organization that cast a new budget every quarter. They managed their organization 90 days at a time, and it all rolled into the annual which could look different in Q4 vs. Q1. I found the concept odd and then learned that the fine-tunes were allowed as business could always be a moving target. It

was a system that worked very well for them and I learned from it. I remained very judicious about spending money; always wisely (at least most of the time), never irresponsibly.

Budgeting became an essential component of business for me as I advanced through my career. I learned to work together with my finance team as they were the people who spoke the lingo. You absolutely need the numbers people. Work well with them.

In the latter stages of my career, I was making million dollar purchasing decisions and managing budgets of over \$350 million. Though the scope and amounts changed, the philosophy to spend money wisely always remained.

Section 7 /=/ My Ladder Lessons \=

Spend company money like it was your own.

Don't be afraid to ask for funding if you've got a good plan.

Don't spend it if you don't need it.

Spending should be in support of a plan, not the other way around.

Be ready for the fine-tuning as conditions adjust.

Set the number and come in on or under plan.

Embrace the finance team and be cautious of calling them bean counters. You might lose some beans you needed.

Take these traits home with you too. Be \$\$ smart.

Section 8 /=/ Innovate \=\

Our country and its people have certainly known innovators in business, technology, science, medicine, government, and more. Some were with technology, some were with strategy, some were with process, and some were with execution. In my career, I have seen many examples and in my own way, used innovation to help succeed.

In my high-tech career, I was fortunate to see and work with some tremendous technology innovation. Honeywell with their building management systems, Diablo Systems with their daisy wheel printer (pre-ink jet), Apple with their Apple//, ///, Lisa, Mac, and Newton. US Robotics with their groundbreaking modem and communication technology, conference phone, internet radio and internet countertop appliances, and Palm (based off the Newton), all the way through to Canon printers and cameras.

We see the results with cool new technology hitting the market. But bringing in new products is always a challenge. At Honeywell, I also did trade show support and would put together plexiglass mini buildings, which had environmental control, fire protection, building management and security systems. The same systems were installed in New York's World Trade Center, Chicago's Sears Tower, San Francisco's Transamerica Pyramid, to name a few. When we introduced a new system, it was supposed to have a printer module connected to run hard copy reports, but that technology had not been completed in time for the show we were in, so we had to get creative. We ended up programming a printer run routine, recording in on cassette, and hooking it to the printer which made it look like it was running off the system. The printer module was eventually completed of course, and the fake printer solution was mothballed.

At Diablo, I supported bringing our ink jet printer to the market. In the early days, we found defective integrated circuits in the carriage control. The defect was moisture caught between layers of silicon. Once heated up, the carriage would slam back and forth, with enough force to smash your fingers if in the way. The innovation was there, though the chip manufacturing was flawed.

At Apple, there were several innovations, including the Newton (first hand-held device) which went on to become the Palm Pilot, then Handspring. This was very powerful innovation although it hit the market prematurely, and the product was riddled with flaws. Here we are with our smart phones of today, which is exactly what the Newton was trying to launch. If you want to see a 1987 video piece from Apple, look up “Knowledge Navigator.” You’ll see everything you have today including voice interfaces (like on your phone and at home). Wozniak thought voice interfaces were going to be a big part of the tech future. His prediction from the 80s was right. ‘Woz’ was a technology innovator; Jobs was a market innovator.

In 1984, our Chicago-based Apple, team created the company’s first CRM (Customer Relationship Management) system. We saw the need to capture product information to channel back to the product design and manufacturing groups for product improvements. The CRM was based on Omnis 3, one of the first cross-platform relational database application tools for Apple computers originally running on Apple //s and Apple ///s. That was our innovation, creating a solution to help product engineering with field information. A few years later (late 80s), we replaced that technology with a Mac-based 4th Dimension relational database system which was far more sophisticated and with a powerful graphic user interface (GUI).

Our Chicago Apple team also created a Mac-based solution using computer aided telephony system. We controlled an Aspect Automatic Call Distributer with a Mac Plus. We even had Mac stations throughout the facility with real-time graphic statistics on our inbound call center statistics. It was a solution that was carried into Apple Corporate, even after our Midwest Region closed during Apple’s decline. Another innovation to improve productivity.

In my own business (21st Century Solutions, post-Apple) my former employees and then partners, John, Gary, and Terry, continued to provide creative Macintosh-based solutions to corporate America. We innovated with Mac-only customers and custom solutions.

At US Robotics, we had the first 56K modem on the market, the Kerbangoo (internet radio), Audrey (a desktop internet

appliance), Conference Link (a conference phone that could outperform its competitors, for a third of the price), and the list goes on. All these things had engineering pioneers who I had the chance to work with; many of them are showcased in The Tech Museum in San Jose, CA. We pioneered several very cool solutions with some very cool people. Undoubtedly, these solutions will stand for years and years and have helped to advance company positions. But don't think for second that these products launched without problems and errors.

New product introduction is always challenging. With the first 56K modem (named X2), the product manager insisted on announcing forecasted ship dates long before the product was ready. He thought it was creating a hard goal that motivated engineering to meet. Instead, we'd get to a date and it would be pushed out. This cycle repeated several times and customers were IRATE because they wanted faster communication speed and they were tired of waiting for the promises to be met. We'd get so many complaint calls that our phone system had a nervous breakdown sending overflow calls to any phone that would ring. The complaint letters were in the hundreds and they all said the same thing. They wanted their X2 modem! The lesson learned: under promise and over deliver, NOT the other way around.

To make matters worse, when the product was eventually shipped, it had a major flaw. It connected at 56K, then would slow down to 44K. Our engineering director coined the phrase "spiraling death" as that's the way it appeared, to spiral down and down on speed. We then had to ship code updates to all customers until the bugs were worked out. That was rough times from a customer satisfaction perspective, but pioneering technology is a tough business.

Also, at US Robotics, our team again created some advanced technical solutions with a product called Apropos, connected to our PBX phone system. It was very much like the Mac solution we had created 10 years earlier. That innovation helped us save hundreds of thousands of dollars in additional telephony equipment. We also did some early work with knowledge bases to help agents and technicians get the answers they need about our products. This was a major efficiency advantage and cost savings.

At Canon, we were ranked dead last in the industry. We turned it around in a year and went on to be #1 in the industry for almost a decade. We improved our web-based self-help systems, put in a speech recognition system, a callback technology system, customer segmentation (providing better service levels for higher-end and margin products), work at home agents, virtual learning materials, improved user manuals with customer feedback and improved employee satisfaction with internal programs meant to make Canon a great place to work. It all added up to an “industry-best” effort which I’m still very proud of today. We had quite a run.

Every team I have led was proud of our pioneering efforts. In all cases there were risks and, in all cases, there was tremendous opportunity.

I talk about other forms of innovation and supporting blue collar trades. My friend Steve (who works on antique Rolls Royce and Bentleys), had a challenge. The old RR 6-cylinder motors would rust their heads to the engine block due to water seeping into the head bolt holes. There are pictures of mechanics attempting to remove the head with a hoist and picking the whole car up in the air. Steve and Ben (another old friend who worked with Steve), improvised a device which was an aluminum plate and a series of metal sleeves with grinding edges that would slowly grind out the rust associated on each bolt, while applying equal downward pressure via other bolts to the head. It was tedious, but after some time, the head just popped loose. I told Steve he should patent that idea, but he did not pursue it. Patents cost several thousand dollars.

Innovating is simply a term I use for breaking through old barriers with new solutions (technical or process). Sometimes those barriers are technical, sometimes operational, sometimes both. It takes vision, courage, and leadership to move an organization into new areas.

Section 8 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Being an innovator will help your organizations succeed more rapidly, less expensively and creatively.

Sometimes you must take some arrows with product or process flaws when you take to market in less than perfect shape.

Look beyond your current solutions. Can things be done better, more efficiently, less expensively?

Think about leveraging technology whenever you can. It is always evolving.

Innovation can save jobs in one respect but create jobs in another.

Assess the risks and rewards of moving forward, including financial and resource investment.

Take the time to do it right; the market can be unforgiving.

When you deliver, relish in the victory by letting your team take the bows. They deserve it.

Under promise, over deliver. Not in reverse.

Do not think for a second that blue collar is not as smart or smarter than you.

Section 9 /=/ Perception \=\

Did you ever meet people who just seemed unaware of what was going on around them (their surroundings)? Unaware of humor, unaware of seriousness, unaware of appropriateness, unaware of people's feelings? I have run across them several times and even employed them in my groups.

We had a technician who just would not control his mouth. He said insensitive, nasty things anywhere and everywhere - work or social settings. We had him on several warnings and eventually separated ways. Years later, he applied to a company where I was an executive and we didn't hire him. His reputation cost him a wonderful employment opportunity.

In the past, I have witnessed ethnic and gender insensitivity, along with sexually inappropriate jokes and comments. If you are in a leadership position you must nip it in the bud and make it stop. One time, we had an employee who felt at liberty to stroke a woman's hair at work. We had to put a stop to that of course, but how odd that someone would think they could do that?

In COVID-19 times, my wife and I reflect on the great reset, where we are making the best of our time together, with walks and mutual support. She even pulled out dinner recipes that I haven't seen before. We put up some supportive posts on social media to offer what we thought to be helpful advice and on occasion, a bit of humor. We were always sensitive to the fact that people are losing their jobs or even lives in this pandemic and the significant impact it has on families and friends. Humor should never come at the cost of minimizing the pain that is out there. When used wisely, it can be a healthy tool for people to cope in these challenging times.

If you have astute perception, you realize your impact on others and adjust accordingly. Your words, actions, and behaviors leave mental impressions and you don't want them to be negative. This is difficult to teach, but there is likely to be sensitivity training available. A person may just need to absorb and live out this virtue. It seems it is built into our DNA, but if not careful, ignorance can set

in. It can also be in our nature to resort to what we know, and think is right, even if it is not right for the audience.

I have always tried to learn from my surroundings. The best teachers for me were simply the people I observed in my life. I learned from the good ones and the bad ones. Once I saw someone's actions, I would process internally and then select the behaviors I thought would work for me.

Think of today's racial sensitivities and some who have put on blackface makeup to portray a character. In the past, people thought less of that but in today's world, it's a different story. The landscape has changed, and people have changed their perceptions. I will tell you that when my brother Rick and I were young, mom put us in local theater, mostly musicals, one of the shows being Show Boat. Our characters required us wearing blackface to portray a couple African American kids. It was fine then, but someone might take issue now even though innocently done at the time.

Section 9 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Make positive social behaviors part of your persona.

You should anticipate how your audience will react to your behaviors.

There are situational conditions. One audience may be different from another.

Reflect on the reactions of your audience. Adjust as needed.

With a blended audience, use the safe approach to make sure you don't misstep.

Learn from others' examples and pick the best for you.

Consider that you want to be spoken of in a favorable context and in high regard.

You don't want to be the person who people whisper about under their breath (in a bad way).

I have always believed in situation leadership. Understanding and adapting to variable conditions.

Think of the term "One size fits all." That doesn't apply when you're working with people because of so many difference personalities and attitudes.

There are static rules and guidelines for all but interfacing and communicating with people requires flexibility.

Section 10 /=/ **Vision** \=\ =

I was once in a meeting with a senior executive where he and his team talked about anticipating the market. He asked us all to look out the windows of the conference room and report what we saw. Then he got up on the conference room table and was able to see further than we did. Maybe a bit weird in some ways, but he was talking and acting metaphorically about a greater vision from what you first see, by changing your vantage point.

In my days at Diablo (a Xerox company), I remember staffing trade shows where the Xerox rep demonstrated the Xerox Star with mouse technology. Xerox had the technical vision, but not the marketing vision. Its technical advantage was lost to Apple who introduced it years later in the Lisa and Mac. What are we all using today? Mouse technology.

In my days at Apple (1981-90), I listened to Steve Wozniak talk about enabling technology of the 21st century. He thought voice recognition would be powerful which, as it turned out, is. “Hi Siri”, “Hi Alexa.” See what I mean?

I also remember Steve Jobs talking about cyber security before it was so prevalent. I asked him how Apple could protect its customers from hackers. He said he looked at cyber protection as an endless engagement. “You put up walls in your operating system, the hackers find a way over, under or around it. So, you build a better wall and the cycle repeats.” Those words are true to this day.

In my areas, our teams were forward-looking and created very advanced technology solutions to improve the customer experience with Apple and provide detailed feedback to engineering toward product improvements. I describe some of these innovations in Section 8.

What is the Wayne Gretzky quote? “I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been.” That is a form of vision. I have known several excellent visionaries in my career. They were

people behind new technologies who anticipated market needs, enabled development, and then hit the market at the right time.

I had a great friend in Bernie who I hired into Apple in the mid-80s and whose dad was a real creative thinker. When visiting Bernie years ago, we stayed at his dad's house which he designed himself. The house was way ahead of its time with cool new technologies built in and found in the most modern homes today.

I designed my house in 1987 on a Mac Plus and incorporated state-of-the-art technology and functional home design that has stood up to the years, and only recently has my installed technology been surpassed by the wireless technology of today.

Your approach to vision may be less technical and more operational, organizational, or procedural. That's just fine. We all step on our rungs differently, so vision is both uniquely important and relative to each of us.

Section 10 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Vision is not easy. You must think above and beyond all the time.

Vision must be sold to get support for what you want to do.

Vision must be executed upon to prove its worth.

Vision is not just one idea. It's a way of thinking that you apply to all your projects.

Sometimes you must change your vantage point to see things from a different angle or perspective.

Dream big. Think of what could be then ask how you could get there. Is it possible? Is it feasible?

How will it change the world and make people's lives better?

How will it change your job or operation? Will it improve things for the customer, or reduce costs?

Skate to where YOUR puck will be.

Section 11 /=/ Reaction \=\

When you were in school and maybe running in track, you may have been in a race where you were assigned a lane (maybe a relay race). As you ran, sometimes the pack got tight. When tight, runners sometimes crossed the line into your lane. How did you react? Did you move into another lane? Did you slow down? Did you speed up? You had to react to avoid crashing and hopefully your reaction went well for you.

In your personal and professional life, you must also react. Your reactions affect your personal life with your friends, dating, marital life, motherhood, or fatherhood. You may be comfortable in your lane but sometimes life crosses the line and you must modify your path.

Business is the same way with new variables introduced all the time. Look at the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and the impact it had on business, people, and our economy. Companies must change how they do business. Restaurants were reduced to carry out only, and with a fraction of their servers. Servers are furloughed and forced to go on unemployment or seek help from family and friends. Masks and even gloves have become standard operating procedure for many stores, establishments, and of course the healthcare environment. Reactions are everywhere.

In these COVID-19 times, I lead the Hampton Roads Innovation Collaborative, a group focused on helping regional technology companies succeed and contribute to the area's economy. One of our programs is called Regional Pillars where we hold quarterly meetings and invite Chief Information Officers (CIOs) to hear presentations from six area tech companies per meeting. With social distancing in place, we had to re-think how we were going to continue. The current over-used term is "pivot" and that is what we did (react). The newly named program is called "Virtual Pitch" and we asked tech companies to post a 15-minute video of their pitch (product, services, programs) in a safe and secure manner. This solution provides a safe approach to giving tech companies visibility to the CIOs who make purchasing decisions.

I have had to react several times in business. When Apple shut down central U.S. operations, employees could either move to California or take a package. I chose to stay in Chicago, so that was my first layoff (reduction in force). Only 10% went to California, and four of us (myself and three of my reports) started up 21st Century Solutions (1990). Our reaction was to develop a new company focused on 100% Mac-based software solutions including CTI (Computer Telephony Integration) interfaces with which we had great familiarity. We ran a good business for three years and then the band broke up.

Back into corporate America I went, getting a director role at Laser. I reacted to change and brought some creative leadership into the organization. We did well though the ship sank due to excessive transfer pricing from a Chinese parent company, and erosion of U.S. profits. I was laid off for a second time. More reaction to change was needed.

After a couple of subsequent director roles and increasing experience and track record, I eventually landed a VP position at US Robotics which went well for six years, until acquisition by 3Com created yet another leaking boat. They decided to exit the consumer business (which I was a part of). That was my third layoff and related reaction.

I consulted for a few months, then made my last corporate move ending up with me in the role of President of Canon Information Technology Services (after a couple promotions) where we achieved #1 industry ranking for several years in a row. That is when I retired from corporate America and focused my professional efforts on regional work.

At one company, I was hired by the president to reorganize the service organization due to serious problems. The repair center was replacing screens on laptops in warranty when they didn't need to and charging the manufacturers twice what other dealer service groups were charging. The OEMs were threatening removing warranty service capability. The technicians were making 30% more than competitive wage because they were also getting commission on their screen replacement work. I recall pulling up in the parking lot in my 89 Pontiac and watching several techs pull up in their Mercedes and BMW rides, thinking that was

curious. I reacted to everything and got everything ship-shape until disaster hit. The president took his own life and the company went up for grabs. I saw the chaos coming and reacted, landing a VP job at a great company. I didn't wait for the ship to sink. I abandoned ship while I still could and hit the perfect timing window to land at the new role.

I recall once being in a company meeting on the west coast. Senior Microsoft people were coming in and we were joking about how much we disliked working with them (but could not avoid it). At one point our GM, with a great deal of humor, wrote "Microsoft Sucks" on the room's whiteboard. Little did he know that someone had mistakenly placed indelible markers in the tray instead of the dry erasable ones. His assistant walked in and announced the Microsoft team had arrived to which point our GM instructed her to bring them in. He stepped up to the board, hit the letters with the dry eraser and they did not come off, no matter how hard he scrubbed. As the visitors were only steps away, our GM reached up and pulled down the retractable projector screen positioned in the ceiling to cover the dry erase board. The meeting went off without a hitch, but I must tell you that my mind wandered as I imagined the screen rolling up on its own exposing our most hidden thoughts.

Reaction is not just about handling your career moves. Sometimes it is more immediate, reacting to conditions, thinking fast on your feet (and landing on them).

The role at Canon Information Technology Services (CITS) was obtained through another reaction. Once 3Com was ramping down, I consulted for a good third-party company, meeting with clients and advising them on their support operations. One such meeting was with the Canon president with whom I struck up a good relationship. He called me one day and asked if I would consider coming to Chesapeake for Canon, to train as his successor when he retired in a couple years. Patty and I were empty nesters and I had always wanted to live by an ocean, so off to the east coast we went in 2003 and fell in love with the lifestyle in a vacation-like community. Seventeen years later, we still love where we are and are happy that I reacted to change which created the opportunity.

Section 11 /=/ My Ladder Lessons \=

The only constant is change.

Be prepared when curve balls come your way - because they will.

Leverage the accumulation of your experience to react and manage your way out of difficulty.

Seek to improve from where you were last; get an even better job.

Don't be afraid to zig-zag around obstacles.

Sometimes relocation is needed to advance (due to area job market).

Don't overreact and make a bad career decision.

Be ready for changes if they happen.

Get opinions from friends and family if needed.

Use your network, reach out to explore new options.

Use erasable markers. They are more forgiving.

Section 12 /=/ **Passion** \=\ =

There is no substitute for passion, perhaps with academics (not me), sports, or business. Remember my stories of work early in my career when I worked hard and fast to outperform my colleagues? If you couple hard work with other attributes (like passion), you'll have a better opportunity of advancement.

In the novel *Moby Dick*, Captain Ahab was passionate about killing the great white whale. On the Pequod, there were also the boatmen, Starbuck and Stubb. Early on in their adventure, they thought Ahab was nuts. Eventually Ahab inspired them with his passion, and they rowed out to their death. Starbuck drove his boat crew with soft, motivational words, while Stubb cursed at them to do better. I preferred Starbuck's approach. It's never good to make employees feel bad if you're trying to inspire passion.

During a time at Apple when we had been very successful, I sensed complacency developing (the team was resting on their laurels), which I did not want to accept. I knew what I was going to do when speaking to the troops. We gathered in a training room and I discussed the opportunity we all had which I referred to metaphorically as a "golden egg". I surprised the team with a raw egg which I started tossing in the air, saying I would toss the egg to each of them, asking if they were going to be the one who dropped it. It came back intact each time, and the exercise worked very well to keep them from being complacent. Yes, I egged them on. Bad pun, but it was a lesson on passion to make us successful.

In my career I never drove people harshly or maniacally. In all cases, I strived to inspire the teams to WANT to create, WANT to outperform, and WANT to succeed. People were proud of their accomplishments, making their mark, their legacy, and their reputation. They were passionate.

If you have ever been to a high-energy conference (like a national or even international sales conference), you will know what I mean. The energy, stage presence, new product introduction, all drive passion in the ranks to go climb mountains. They WANT to be the giant slayers with their PASSION.

In some cases, large sales conferences are like feeding red meat to the lions. They can't get enough. At Apple, we had a Senior Sales Exec who was a former college football coach. He was an impassioned speaker, great motivator, and stellar people person. He liked to hug but no one minded being hugged by "The Coach". People would go into business battle for him. He had passion as did his sales troops. Over time, as senior execs do, he moved on, and his successor tried hard to fill his shoes. I will never forget one conference where he came putting onto stage on a running Harley Davidson. Not being familiar enough with the machinery, he thought he had it in neutral but didn't and launched himself off the front of the elevated stage and landed hard several feet below. He was fine, no one got hurt but WOW what an entrance! He had plenty of passion, just no biker skills.

In another case, we had an Apple Conference in Boca Raton FL just to thumb our nose in front of IBM who had a facility there. We had some ridiculous levels of passion (and partying). A couple extreme Australian sales reps turned on the fire hoses on an upper floor at a very exclusive hotel we were staying at, then sprayed a fire extinguisher in the face of security guards checking things out. It was horrible, but no one was hurt. Apple cut a check for \$1M on the spot to avoid further litigation and negative publicity. The two Aussies were terminated and shipped back to the land down under the next day. Passion is not to be considered as an excuse for poor judgement and dangerous behavior.

The founder/CEO at US Robotics used to ride his bicycle in the building halls, stopping to ask employees if they knew what the mission statement of USR was. He'd hand out \$10 if you answered the question correctly. He did this to develop passion and enthusiasm with employees. It worked.

There are tons of examples of developing and having passion about what you're doing, and how to share that passion. Whatever the examples were, they had a common denominator; to drive for passion and excitement which helps to motivate people to succeed

Section 12 // **My Ladder Lessons** \=

To succeed, you must demonstrate passion and inspire others to join in it.

Do it with kindness, determination, and objectivity. Don't be a Stubb, be a Starbuck.

Be careful with your passion. Leave the whale alone and it might leave you alone.

In all cases, let your teams take the bows. You'll get your credit for leadership from management and your team.

No showboating. Are you solving a problem or just doing something cool? Have a legitimate purpose.

You represent your company. Don't be a crazed jerk when on a business road trip.

Get others to believe in what you're doing and share your passion.

Put the bike in neutral before getting off it.

Never drop the egg.

Section 13 /=/ Deliver Results \=\

Under promise and over deliver is usually how I played my hand. You want to let your senior leadership know they have the right person and you can get it done. Just don't hang yourself out there with unrealistic expectations. See Section 8 on Innovate for ways my teams exceeded expectations and achieved results.

While at Honeywell, I worked faster and shipped more data gather panels than anyone else and was promoted to lead the department to do the same. We achieved leading performance as a team.

At Diablo, I was hired to make sure their regional service group performed at high levels. We did it as a team and it resulted in my promotion. Rather than move to Texas for Diablo, I decided to go to work for a fruit company called Apple.

At Apple, I was hired to start a regional service group and that was a great challenge. We opened a repair organization, training organization and incoming call center.

At 21st Century Solutions (our own consulting business), we achieved \$1M in annual sales within a couple years.

At Laser Computer and Elek-Tek, I was hired to turn around failing customer service groups that were getting many customer or manufacturer complaints. In both cases, more operational and procedural improvements than technology. Great results just the same.

At US Robotics (USR), I was again hired to turn around a failing customer service organization with lots of customer complaints. We did it with better procedures, use of call center technology and web self-help knowledgebases. This was a great atmosphere for success with high levels of achievement.

I will never forget a lesson about delivering results while at USR. We were acquired by 3Com; it was a challenging merger of two distinctively different corporate cultures. In one meeting, the USR Divisional GM told the 3Com VP Sales that it was important to make the sales number commitment. The number can be what you

set (if reasonable). Just remember to make your commitment and make the number. The GM always made the number because he knew the business, he knew the team, he knew what could be done and his teams made the number. The 3Com guy started putting up all the reasons why numbers can't always be met. He could not win the argument with the GM and he didn't. In business, one must constantly strive to meet or exceed expectations. A sales financial target is a prime example because it is a cornerstone for ensuring that adequate resources (manufacturing, distribution, customer support) are in place to support the anticipated business. If the number isn't met, it equates to erosion of business profit by having excess capacity (and related costs) in place (for less revenue). The GM understood these dynamics. The other guy not so much.

At Canon, I was hired as a turn-around guy as well. Canon was listed as last place in *PC Magazine's* "Readers Poll", and Canon HQ in Japan wanted that changed. I was hired after developing a plan and presenting it to my prospective boss on how we would make the turn. Within the first year, we went from last place to first place. Every year after that, we were #1. I will never forget the senior Japanese leader saying to me, "Dan-san, you have exceeded all expectations." That felt good because he did not hand out compliments very often.

Many times, we may have roadblocks or barriers to our success. There's an old saying, "Unless you're the lead dog, the view is always the same." I have always thought that "putting the pedal to the medal" for achievement and delivering results could overcome those barriers and position me higher on the ladder where the view would improve. It worked for me, and it may work for you too.

In your own world, you must make the number (literally or metaphorically) and deliver the promised results. Sometimes things go sideways, and you need to react, correct, and keep your eye on the target to make success happen.

Section 13 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Under promise and over deliver.

Make sure your commitments are achievable.

Make sure you're resourced correctly to make it happen.

Make sure you have a realistic timetable.

Make sure your team has all the right players in the right seats to achieve success.

Don't make excuses to not deliver.

Deliver on your commitments.

Adjust on the way to stay on target.

Make the number.

Section 14 /=/ **Expand Your Scope** \=\

Consider our discussion about complacency in Section 12 on Passion. To me, a form of complacency is getting a job and thinking that it's good enough. I have worked with people who did the same thing for years: same job, same title, same responsibilities. This is not wrong per se, as some people want the routine and stability and become "pros in position". However, for me, I would get bored easily or want to climb the ladder to prove my worth (at least in my own mind) and achieve what I consider to be loftier goals. I never wanted to become complacent.

The first thing you may want to consider for yourself is what you want to get out of your job or career. What motivates you? Do you want to be happy and fulfilled? Are you a routine person, or are you a ladder-climber? No wrong answer here, just what is right for you at a given point in time. Your answers may change over time if you get bored or want to achieve higher compensation levels and recognition. Reflection is valuable.

At every stop on my business journey, I sought ways to set myself apart, achieve, and ask for more responsibility. In some cases, I am sure people thought they would give me enough rope to hang myself. That never happened because I worked hard to meet the target and exceed expectations.

In the movie *Jeremiah Johnson* with Robert Redford, Jeremiah Johnson wanted to be a mountain man. He made the acquaintance of a grizzly old mountaineer and said he wanted to learn how to skin a bear. Standing in the cabin one day, Johnson heard the old mountaineer yelling outside. Johnson looked outside to see a grizzly bear running after the old man, who ran into the cabin's front door followed by the bear. Moments later, the old man leapt out the window on the other side of the cabin and yelled to Johnson, "Skin that and I will bring you another!"

The notion here is that this is probably NOT how you want to stretch yourself. This example could have worked out very poorly. You should become good at what you are doing before you dare to ask for more. Show your expertise, show your competence, show that you have the right stuff before you ask for more. You will

have opportunities to win more responsibility and, above all else, don't let the bear win.

You cannot clean or paint the second-floor areas of your house without climbing a ladder, sometimes higher than your comfort level. You know you must get the job done. Some people are comfortable with only a freshly painted single-story. We all have varying amounts of potential. I believe you cannot advance in life or career without stretching yourself to reach higher or farther.

RUNGS *not* WRONGS is a personal account and advisory on climbing your career ladder rung by rung to get to your target effectively and efficiently.

You must be hungry enough to achieve higher goals, positions, and levels of accomplishment. Expanding your roles will generally pay off in the sense of earning new and better opportunities. Just be self-aware of what is called the “Peter Principle”, when someone is promoted based on their successes until they reach a level at which they are no longer competent. Not all skill sets translate to the next level.

Section 14 // **My Ladder Lessons** \=)

Determine what makes you tick. Routine or advancement?

Do you want a job for life or a career?

If you want a better career, you'll have to adjust to ensure you are getting the opportunities to prove yourself.

If you seek advancement, perfect your craft, demonstrate competency, reach, and ask for more responsibility.

Never get complacent. Move forward and upward.

Sometimes you have to zig-zag when your advancement is not linear.

Don't be a "Peter Principle" example.

Don't let the bear get you.

Section 15 // Planning & Execution \=/

The old saying is “Failure to plan is planning to fail.” If you are a small business looking for a business loan or funding, you are required to have a business plan. If you are a leader in business, you are required to have a business plan. Even in life, it is best if you lay things out to see where you are, where you want to be, and how to get there.

In business, I have been asked for business plans, even 5-year plans which I thought was a real stretch to look forward that far with any accuracy. We did it and got close (for that long of a plan, you can anticipate adjustments).

When working with my teams, we always had think sessions, strategy sessions, or retreats where we looked at the big picture as much as possible. Where are we? Where do we want to go? How will we get there? We created scenarios. What happens if?

In times of the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, I can assure you that businesses will be rethinking their models to achieve resiliency and continuation of efforts. What is our plan the next time something like this happens? How will the supply chain support its customers? What are the various resilience models that keep business going? This will be a big part of business strategy development going forward. For years, there has been a “Force Majeure” clause in almost all contracts. It is a legal requirement indicating that if all hell broke loose unavoidably, then contractual liabilities were released. I am certain that’s our 2020 situation.

When I was at Canon, we had a single customer contact center in Chesapeake, VA with about 600 people. I was from the Chicago-area and never experienced a hurricane. When Hurricane Isabel hit the region directly, we remained operational with generator power, but people could not get to work because of road closures. This was not part of our disaster planning; and it was a very close call. We regrouped to create a remote worker (work from home) solution so that if you had power at home and the internet was working, you could support customers. We learned that our company was not resilient enough, so we reacted, we planned, and we achieved added resiliency for the future.

At Diablo, Apple, and 3Com, I had to travel to Silicon Valley for business countless times. We had to deal with earthquakes, forest fires, water shortages, traffic, and fog. Most times, business and people overcame challenges, even if it took a while. Humans are resilient. It's hard, if not impossible, to anticipate everything that can go wrong. It is wise to consider that if it can go wrong, it will. Thorough planning will help you anticipate the future.

Now let's talk about planning. A plan is only as good as its deployment and execution. I have participated in multiple studies on a variety of topics. These studies were intended to help develop a plan. Unfortunately, in too many cases, the effort dropped off at the execution stage. The studies were rendered useless because there was no deployment strategy to include objectives, timelines, owners, and metrics to measure milestones.

In your career, have you ever stopped creating a plan or did you keep the plan open like a living document, referring to it periodically to make sure you were following the plan? I have been involved in creating "Balanced Scorecards", a strategy performance management tool with a structured report used in business to keep track of the execution of activities, and to monitor the consequences arising from these actions. I have found that tools like this help you create a plan and execute your planning.

I was often hired to "turn things around" in a company. In one case, we had huge call center problems. The problems were that the organization was afraid to take inbound calls live, so they sent calls to operators who would take messages and have techs call back the customer. Can you say, "Telephone Tag?" Obviously, customers hated that system, so we changed it to normal inbound queuing and managed 2-3-minute hold times. That was a win.

In another case, we had a horrible parts delivery problem. I hired Bob, a great parts guy who quickly assessed that the substitute parts tables were not being used correctly (sometime different part numbers are equivalents). We populated those and blew out the backorders within a week. That was a big win with most customer complaints going away.

In another case, we had a call center manager operating foot pedals to cut off 10 inbound lines per pedal. This essentially

disconnected trunks for customers dialing in and they would get busy signals vs. hold times. When hold times got too high (measured by her phone system management system), she just hit a pedal. Customer complaints were high, and we blew that up. That too was a big win. I can tell you that twice in my career, when going for an annual review, my boss would just play the role of the customer, dialing in and judging the experience. Thankfully, all went well.

Sometimes you pluck the low hanging fruit, so you can get the easy stuff out of the way, in other words fix the immediate problems. Once that's done, you can go in deeper to start planning improvements at a greater level.

In your personal life, there are plenty of areas that require a plan:

- Good planning: Taking your family on a 5,000-mile vacation and having the forethought to put in a portable 12-volt TV/VCR to let them watch movies instead of fighting and spit balling me while driving.
- Bad planning: Bringing the movie *Grease* so they could watch it continuously on the entire journey. The silver lining is, I know all the songs, and have the words memorized.
- Good planning: On a west coast trip, renting a convertible so I could drive my family down the Pacific Coast Highway 1.
- Bad planning: On a west coast trip, renting a convertible so I could drive my family down the Pacific Coast Highway 1. I got 10 miles down the road and the kids were screaming it was so cold and windy. The top went up and stayed up until San Diego!
- You should have a will or a personal living trust. These are nothing more than a plan to be followed when you depart. If you have a family, you'll need one to ensure that your family is taken care of.

You get the idea? Business is the same way. You do not have to use a specific tool, technique, or process. However, you should strive for the mentality and methodology to create and execute your plan, anticipating every curveball you can. It is a form of discipline, so that you are taking each step, or rung, carefully.

Section 15 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Everyone should plan to some degree, unless you want to be completely random which can be reckless.

Planning requires mental effort, and possibly involvement of other parties.

Be realistic in your plans.

Be somewhat aggressive in your plans.

Anticipate the stretch goals but don't be sucked in by the BHAG (Big Hairy Audacious Goal). It might work, but they can also make you fail miserably, and you can crash hard if they don't.

Manage to your plan (track your success to goal), adjust as needed.

Anticipate your "Force Majeure" worst case.

Create your resiliency plan.

Don't fail to plan, or you can plan to fail.

Always have a Plan B.

Be prepared to put the top up.

Section 16 /=/ **Delegation vs. Micromanagement** \=\

If you want something done right, do it yourself. That's another saying that can create problems. Are you a single contributor or are you a leader? You may know how to do right though you may also have the responsibility to ensure others know how.

If you are a single contributor, maybe that saying is correct. If you are a leader, then is not it more about training those you lead to get trained and do it right? And who says that they won't do it better than you did?

In my early days as at Tech Lab supervisor, we needed a big (and I mean BIG) simulation system that had all our technologies on board. I convinced my team that this was the right thing to do and they started building it. We called it MEGA BUG.

It wasn't going well after a couple days so I jumped in and essentially did it. I messed up. Sure, I got the system working, but in the process, I stepped on toes to get there. I started off with delegation and moved into micromanagement. I learned my lesson. That was an error on my part.

In subsequent roles, I learned to not always do it myself. I learned to lead others to accomplish our goals, sometimes differently and better than I would have done. Of course, there may be the situation where you have the vision, just not the skills to execute to completion. That happened often for me.

In several of my roles, we used technology and process management to enhance our business operations. I inspired the team to create new ideas and solutions and delegated giving them rein. They loved working on special projects.

On the other hand, I worked for an organization with distributed field people across the country and the VP clearly had a control issue. He badgered people throughout the day to ask what they were doing. This micromanagement was horrible considering that just even talking to him about what we were doing took time away from what it was we were supposed to be doing.

President Ronald Reagan used to say, "Trust but Verify." There is a fine line between delegating and making sure the job is getting done correctly. Effective delegation is a great management technique, yet it is also a good thing to verify results in a professional and calculated manner. That is why there are quality control groups as part of organizations. That is why there are editors for writers.

I thank my daughters Rachael and Bridget, sister-in-law Lin, and friend Danette for quality control on this book as they helped me with editorial review. I thought I was a decent writer. I trusted what I could do but wanted to verify my work. Not surprisingly, I needed their help and delegated to them for that assistance.

Section 16 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

If you are involved in teams, you may have to delegate.

Delegation requires vision, instruction, and patience to let people try, fail, and succeed.

Even though you are delegating, you are still responsible for the output for your team. You need to manage to people's and organizational results, balancing two different dynamics to achieve positive results.

Micromanagement should be avoided, but sometimes you need to jump in (when the time is right) for course correction.

If you need to be closely involved, do it right. Involve your teams, talk them through it, explain why you are in it.

Make it a team victory regardless, even if you delegate smaller chunks.

Don't fall into the trap of doing it yourself to do it right (if you can avoid it).

Teach vs. Do, may be the better approach.

Section 17 /=/ **Fine-Tuning** \=\ =

Musicians enter the orchestra pit or stage and take out their instruments. They play notes and adjust their instruments until it sounds correct. The finest musical instruments cannot sound their best without fine-tuning. Musicians and athletes train and fine-tune their personal skills to improve.

In life, we need to fine-tune. Have we been in relationships that have gone well? What have we learned? Have we been in relationships that have gone poorly? What have we learned? We think we are doing everything correctly until something happens. Bad review? Bad breakup? Bad performance? These things can be small wake-up calls which hopefully trigger your adjustment and fine-tuning.

In my early days, I was a mechanic and welder and I had to be somewhat tough. I decided to leave that job when I was hurting myself and having too many near death experiences. I worked at an independent shop that was not big on safety. A truck broke a jack stand and came down, nearly crushing me (I had some safety blocks just in case). A truck started on fire with me under it. I had a 1-ton press spring loose and clip my lip with the flying piston. That could have split my head open. For self-preservation, I decided to go into the computer industry and that ended up being a very good decision. I fine-tuned myself to get into what I thought was a better and safer field.

I rode motorcycles since my teen years. I got into fights when I was younger. Hung out at bad bars, arm wrestled and shot pool for money, and generally got into trouble. I eventually figured out this was not good for me in the long term. Any time you have the business end of a .45 caliber pointed at you from 3' away (for winning some money that the person didn't want to pay), it causes you to reconsider how you got there and if that is where you want to be. I was a different person then and improved throughout the years because back then, I thought my life was at risk and I wasn't going to reach my potential (let alone my senior years). I fine-tuned myself to get away from the dark elements that were unhealthy and unwise.

In business, I started out rough as well, bringing the biker persona in with me. I was raw and inexperienced in a white-collar industry, but quickly figured out that this was not going to help me advance. I changed (mostly) and worked hard to start impressing and advancing in the ranks. I had to transition from my old self to a new self and it was not without some bumps in the road. I learned from others around me. I took courses to enhance my skill set and even got that bachelor's degree eventually so I would have the paper and not the roadblock. I fine-tuned myself toward self-improvement and eventually got a college degree.

Fine-tuning can be your social interaction, use of humor, control of mood, how you treat people, how you spend money, how you relieve stress, anything, and everything. It is just a method of continuous improvement, so you don't get in a rut, don't get in a cubby hole, don't get profiled, and don't get stuck. Be that person who learns from both positive and negative experiences, adjusts, and improves. Practice your own fine-tuning.

I have spent most of my career fine-tuning myself. I like to consider myself a work in progress. At this time of my life, I consider myself as having been there and done that (relative to who I am as a person, better than some, not as good as some).

If you are the same person you were years ago, fine, that might work for you. It may also be that you have not fine-tuned yourself, doing things a bit differently, better, and adaptive. Think about it and know that it is never too late to fine-tune.

Section 17 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Unless you are perfect, fine-tuning is necessary.

Learn from your surroundings, experience, and from other people.

If you were an instrument, you should be in perfect pitch.

If you were a musician, you should be at the top of your skill set and getting there takes lots of practice.

Invest time in yourself to achieve continuous improvement.

Check your results with family, friends, and co-workers. How are you being perceived? Is it working?

Be careful about getting into a comfortable rut.

Try not to lower your guard too often. One big mistake can hurt you.

Reflect and be a life-long learner.

Section 18 /=/ The Whole Package \=\

I have always believed that we are a collection of various elements: a mosaic, a puzzle, a multi-cylinder engine. Our personas are based on many parts. Those can be having fun, a good personality, being sensitive, a good leader, a high skill set, common sense, team player and more.

Have you seen people who were geniuses in their space though off in other ways? At Apple, I met both Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak. Jobs had an edge or a shell. Woz was a regular guy in my estimation. Both were brilliant in their lanes.

Ray Kroc put me in a Mac's (McDonald's) commercial when I met him at a store where I worked in Elk Grove Village, IL. It was right down the street from Hamburger University where they used to train store managers. He asked me how I liked working for Mac's and I said "It's OK" with a smile. Next thing you know I was on camera. This was back in the early 70s. If you had asked me what Ray was like, I would say "Cool." It really wasn't until years later that I found out the conditions that existed for him to take McDonald's to where they ended up. The movie *The Founder* is about how Ray Kroc became involved with the McDonald brothers and eventually took control of the franchise. The brothers did OK but got the short end of the stick compared to Ray, that's for sure.

I worked for a guy once who was the nicest, most quiet, mild-mannered person 99% of the time. When he was upset, he'd turn into a red-faced screamer. I worked there for three years and thankfully, was never on the receiving end. Ironically, when we merged with another company, his boss was the same. I would see them be soft-spoken to one another until a disagreement occurred, then it would escalate to their red-faced screaming matches. It was unbelievable to see. They deserved each other.

Many of us have seen brilliant people succumb to lapses in judgement which cost them dearly with respect to work, as well as their home lives, even their freedom.

The idea here is that you must operate on all cylinders. No matter how many cylinders you have in your engine, if they are not

all firing evenly, you'll under-perform as an individual, at work, or home.

Public speaking is a great example. You can be on top of your game and sometimes people will want to hear from you. Sometimes that can be in speech in front of hundreds of people.

I had a good friend and colleague at one company who was a high-level CFO. His weakness was public speaking and he knew it. To improve, he joined "Toastmasters" where he had to give regular speeches to his group. He got very good at it.

He inspired me and I went with the Dale Carnegie program, with the same goal. I got better too and have given speeches in front of hundreds. I still don't like it. I just go into a zone and get the job done. The best advice I can give you is knowing your content fluently and think of you talking to a group of friends.

When talking about the whole package, the idea is not to be a one trick pony. What that means is that you do one thing very well, but not so great in other areas. None of us are perfect at everything, but what we should strive for is a high level of balanced performance.

Character flaws are hard to escape, but that just means that there are additional opportunities for us to work on and make better.

G. Gordon Liddy was one of the people convicted in the Watergate scandal way back in the early 1970s. He was ex-FBI and a little extreme. When he was a kid, he accidentally burned himself and was then afraid of fire. He then would burn himself intentionally to overcome fear of getting burned. He was also afraid of rats when young, so decided to go where rats would hang out under piers to confront them and conquer his fear.

These are extreme examples and I don't recommend any of them. What I do recommend is identifying and working to strengthen your areas of weakness.

Section 18 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

You are a sum of your parts.

Each part needs to be operational, or you cannot achieve peak performance.

Failing in one area can cost you success, regardless of strength in your other areas.

No one is perfect, just try to achieve a consistently good approach everywhere.

Sometimes you must simply self-reflect and practice in areas you are not comfortable with.

Speaking is part of success. Be ready for it.

Don't be a one trick pony.

Work on your character flaws or weaknesses to raise performance in all areas. The higher average will be noticed.

Remember my ego wall. Those were all areas of self-improvement.

Work to identify your challenged areas and then work to get better.

Don't be like Liddy.

Section 19 /=/ **Timing & Luck** \=\

Famous film producer Samuel Goldwyn said, “The harder I work, the luckier I get.” I’m a firm believer in that approach.

I have heard people say they would rather have timing and luck over skill any day. Though I think there is some truth to that, I also think you can create your own good timing and luck if you bring the right skills. Being in the right place at the right time is huge. How you got to the right place may be because of what you did to land in that spot. Perhaps you did all the right things to open the door of being there. Being in the right place at the right time can reap great rewards. Get it?

My thought is that everything you do (if done correctly) helps you to achieve positioning; positioning with the right people, positioning in the right industry, positioning in the right job, positioning to be in the right place at the right time.

If you create and follow a good playbook, you may end up in a good position. That position can be the recipient of some very good things and I speak from personal experience.

Skills are necessary for you to achieve more in business. You might even find jobs in the companies that are hot in industry. If you land there, opportunities will exist, so play your cards right.

Back in the day, we would be rewarded with stock options that could translate to enough dollars to buy a house, put your kids through college, even buy some toys for your hobbies.

If this happens to you, it is easy to say that you had good timing or were lucky. However, the fact remains that you may have earned your way to those good things happening. You created your own good timing and luck.

Danette is my friend from Apple and a contributing editor on this book. Back when we were at Apple, she owned a beautiful yellow Labrador dog named Gustavus of Ivanhoe (nicknamed Gus). When Danette’s kids were young, they got Gus, but as he grew, he just got a little too big for them. She offered Gus to me as we were just into our new home and had $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre for Gus to romp on.

We took Gus in when he was a year old and we had a great life together. Gus would run all over, pull the kids off sleds, chase us around and generally, make us proud to be his family. We decided to breed Gus because he was so handsome, his was dad a national champion and his mom beautiful. Gus helped put one hundred gorgeous yellow labs on the ground. We were lucky to get Gus. The friendship I created with Danette created the conditions for Gus to come to our home. The fact that we both worked at Apple allowed that friendship to take place. Timing and luck were at hand, yet we earned our places at Apple where they took place.

Because I reached senior positions within my areas of USR and 3Com (including international leadership), I was able to travel the world. That was good timing and luck, but I was also able to meet Probir from the UK. He'd answer the phone with "Probir here." My family always got a charge out of that response. "Prob's" dad was an Indian Duke who walked away from his family wealth to marry Prob's mom, who was a beautiful Englishwoman. His dad went on to become a very successful businessman in his own right, and he had the wife he wanted and loved. A storybook romance. This was an admirable move, and the very definition of love.

I promoted Probs to my International Director, and we travelled the world together (much of Europe and Asia) starting up and managing international operations. Probir was and is a brilliant person (educated as a genetic scientist, then businessman, then musician and film producer). When we travelled, he was a walking, talking history book. I learned so much from him. There aren't enough pages in the book to describe our international experiences, but I will list just a few samples.

We were able to view an illegal ivory carving plant in China. I cannot tell you how we got in there, but I can tell you that we had AK 47s trained on us the whole time. For our 10-minute walk through, we were told to follow our guide, keep moving, don't touch anything, and don't ask anyone anything. I asked how these things were known and allowed and was told that sometimes secrets are traded for national security purposes and certain things are ignored for that sake of extremely high-value information.

We had the opportunity to stay in the Raffles hotel in Singapore. I was lucky enough to get the room that the Japanese

General Yamashita stayed in when they occupied the area in WWII. The Raffles had a famous lounge/bar on the ground floor where the drink 'Singapore Sling' was invented. One morning the staff were opening and found a tiger had wandered in and was sleeping under a billiard table. Hence forth, the bar's name was the Tiger Lounge. Too bad the tiger did not escape alive, but that was a long time ago.

In England, I was amazed by London, but also the surrounding areas. We took a side trip to Stonehenge one weekend where we heard an American with a cowboy hat say, "They should fix this thing up." Tourists! I'm not sure if he was kidding or not.

In London, we hung out at the Voodoo Lounge one night because we heard some of the Stones would be there. In the process of waiting, I got involved in a conversation with a clean-cut looking guy who said he was waiting for them. I asked what his line of work was, and he said, "pharmaceutical sales." I was so naïve, but my team got a big laugh over it and pulled me away for my protection.

India, Delhi, and the Taj Mahal were great. While visiting, there were some issues with neighboring Pakistan and as a visiting executive, I was told to "Look less American." I did my best. Delhi was crazy with smog, people driving on either side of the road without care, professional children beggars with maimed limbs (done intentionally at birth). It sure makes you happy and grateful to get home when you witness these conditions.

While in Malaysia, I recall Probs and I were driving late at night in an Audi A4 doing about 100 mph in the rain. It was late and we were trying to get to the hotel. I was the wheelman and should have been going much slower. I flew over a rise, and on the other side was flooded highway. We hit the water hard and could not see anything for about 5 seconds. I turned the wipers on, and when we came out, pumped the brakes to ensure we were straight and safe. Probs had been sleeping and when we finally slowed down to a more reasonable speed, I looked over at him and his eyes were as wide-open as I would ever see them. Few words were spoken, but I slowed down.

In one international meeting, I met with the president of the contract firm we were using. At his office while chatting, I

looked around and saw lots of memorabilia of the SR-71. Nicknamed "The Blackbird," it was a super-fast (2,200 mph), super high-flying (100,000 feet) spy plane that flew from 1964-1999. This spy plane that could outrun and outclimb most defense systems and not one was ever shot down. I started asking Jim some questions, unfortunately, there was very little he could tell me that was not still classified. He flew everywhere. I asked if he saw any weird things up at 100,000 feet. He just smiled. Years later, I was leaving the Richmond Airport and saw a small aircraft museum with a retired SR-71 parked outside. Of course, I had to go in there (my wife Patty was a captive audience). In the tour, I noticed a picture on the wall of all the living SR-71 pilots at a reunion they held there years earlier. Looking closely at the picture, I saw each person had autographed their image. I saw his picture with his 30 or so colleagues. SR-71 pilots were a small community.

In early summer of 2001, I was planning our global meeting in Cairo when I got a call from the head of 3Com security who told me to cancel the meeting because the on-line chatter was loud. He had the authority and I complied. Two months later the attacks of 9/11 took place.

There are plenty more examples but suffice it to say that Probir and I were fortunate to have met one another, and our timing and luck together was great. Probir had always been a bachelor. On one of our trips he met Kristi who worked for the local Melbourne, Australia office (managed by Ross). They eventually fell in love and Probs announced his permanent relocation to the Melbourne area. I always told Probir that I would be happy to stand up in his wedding, wherever it was in the world. I turned out to be in Adelaide, Australia (at Kristi's parents' home) and Patty and I travelled there to be a part.

I worked for a Senior VP at 3Com who was a very large man, approaching 6' 6" and 350 pounds at the time. He was a great professional and built his career to be in the right place at the right time, eventually leading the Palm division. He created his luck and timing and one year took a trip to China. While there, he toured the Great Wall. The Chinese were amazed by his size and started handing their babies to him so they could get pictures of him with their child. One after another they crowded around him, handing

over their children, snapping away. He was so kind-hearted, he obliged for better part of an hour. When back stateside, he told us this story, grateful to be at The Wall with the amazed locals. But the luck was on the side of the parents who now had pictures of their child with the great American giant!

Apple was a great place to be when I was there. USR was a great place to be when I was there. Canon was a great place to be when I was there. These jobs were the best I've had in my career journey and things worked out very well.

When I talk about these stories, I often hear from people about how lucky I am to have experienced these things. I agree, but I worked to create my own good luck and timing, which allowed me to be in the right place at the right time.

The question you must ask yourself is what career steps will you take to climb your career ladder, rung by rung? Will you be the cautious person who just wants a job, or the more aggressive person who wants a career?

Do you want your career to be one of leadership and are you willing to do what you need to do to exceed expectations, and demonstrate that you've got the right stuff? All these decisions will help to create your good timing and luck.

Section 19 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

You might get lucky. More than likely you will not.

Don't rely on blind luck. Position yourself to be a recipient of good things.

Don't wait for good things to happen to you. Create the conditions for good things to happen to you.

Positioning is achieved by following a good playbook.

Make smart decisions and take responsibility for where you end up.

Sometimes it's not the highest salary, but better growth or market opportunity (long run view).

Create your environment for success and getting noticed.

Every dog has its day. Gus had plenty of good days.

Don't touch the ivory.

Listen to Security.

Have your camera ready.

Section 20 /=/ **Loyalty** \=\

Data Domain was a very popular Apple Dealer in Rolling Meadows, IL, owned by John Clark of the Clark Lift Trucks family. The computer store was a hobby business. I met three techs there: Bill, Kirk, and Chris. Over the course of time, each one of them asked me to hire them at Apple, whose offices were little more than a mile away. I would never hire anyone from a dealer without the owner's permission for professional courtesy reasons. John was thrilled and supportive and we staged their hiring over several months to make sure it didn't hurt John's business. All three of them were excellent employees and contributing members to our great team. Over the next several years, after the Apple office had closed, I had opportunities to hire them at the subsequent companies where I worked. These guys were good, solid, loyal employees and they deserved these new opportunities. I repaid them for their loyalty, and we are still friends.

Elek-Tek was the cool boutique computer store where I met, Ann, Lael, Thomas, Ahmed, Anil, and others. All great people and when Elek-Tek folded, I had the opportunity to hire them into US Robotics, repaying them for their loyalty, and some of us remain connected.

Michael (the divisional GM from USR mentioned previously) hired me at US Robotics and our organization did some great work there. Michael and I have remained friends going on 25 years now. In 2019, Michael flew his plane into Norfolk and was a keynote at an event I was organizing. He also helped me produce some antique car parts in his home shop. Michael was one of the coolest people I have ever worked for and known, and our loyalty to one another is strong.

I met Mickey at US Robotics and she was a great employee. Years later I had the opportunity to bring her into a new role at Canon, repaying her for her loyalty and giving her the opportunity to live near her family in Virginia Beach, VA.

To this day, I get together with the old team once or twice a year for dinner. I have worked with these people from the 80s, 90s and 00s. Thanks to Mary, Jenn, Anne, Barb, Martin, Chris, Ken,

and Bill for their long-term friendships and loyalty. Along the journey of my career, I appreciated hard work, dedication, and loyalty from our employees. What is good for one, is good for the other.

Are you loyal to the people who have been loyal to you? Don't just expect loyalty. If they earn it, give it back.

I can't exit this chapter without mentioning how loyalty is expected on the home front as well. We expected love and loyalty from our family and if you have a family, they will expect love and loyalty from you. In fact, unconditional.

My brother Rick and his wife Denni had a special needs child, my nephew Tony. Tony's disabilities were so severe, that he couldn't walk or talk (though he learned to sign). While his body aged, his mind was that of a 5-year-old. Regardless, they had him involved in as many activities as they could, while wheelchair bound. Rick and Denni demonstrated unconditional love and loyalty for Tony until he passed at the age of 24. He was never institutionalized and lived several years longer being at home with his mom, dad, and brother. I salute Rick and Denni for their loyalty, love, and care to Tony,

Loyalty begets loyalty.

Developing high-performance teams can evolve over time and with experience.

Loyalty should be bi-directional and an investment for the future.

If people were good to you, remember that and return the favor.

What ye sow, so shall ye reap.

Be a good judge of character and learn who to keep in your circle.

Treat the people in your circle well.

Bring loyalty to your friends and family.

Section 21 /=/ **You Win Some, You Lose Some** \=\

Anyone who says they like to fail because that is where they learn best is not operating from the same playbook as I am.

I hate to fail, though I can and do learn from it. That does not mean I like it. In fact, I avoid it like the plague (or COVID-19). For this reason, I do not gamble. I do not like to lose and throw my money away.

The famous Apollo 13 line is “Failure is not an option.” A great motivational line, just not accurate in my opinion. It IS a forced, non-selected option if you are laying it all out there. In my experience, there have been failures along the way. My strategy is keeping the failures small and minimal, while I perfect my craft.

In the process of developing new technology, there are always failures. Apple’s Newton hand-held was one for sure. But that idea went on to inspire the Palm Pilot, eventually morphing into the smart phones of today. That was a loss at the time but when matured, an amazing win for other companies. USR’s Audrey internet appliance was one for sure. But that idea went on to inspire the Kindle, iPad, and Google Chromebook. A loss at the time, but years later a big win for other companies.

While developing 56K modem technology, the whole industry failed. Had it not been for the random contact by a free-lance tech genius to US Robotics, who knows what the company would have been first? The inventor called into us, proved he knew how to do it, we acquired his intellectual property, and shipped the world’s first 56K modem, licensing the IP to all other modem manufacturers. Why did he call us? He listed all modem manufactures alphabetically and started calling them. All manufacturers blew him off except for US Robotics (after us, only Zoom was left). We took him seriously and it worked out well for us. That was a BIG win.

Companies like IBM, Motorola, and Canon have tons of patents, though patents do not guarantee market success. They eventually succeeded with some of the new technology, though failed (sometimes miserably) along the way in many cases. In all

examples there were both risks and great rewards. Xerox invented the mouse interface but couldn't market it correctly. That was a loss for them. But Steve Jobs with Apple used it with Mac products and that was a BIG win.

As I mentioned before, we pioneered several very cool solutions with some very cool people. Many of those solutions stood for years and years and helped to advance our company position. Perhaps even more importantly, we changed the world with our technology. The first 56K modem, the Palm Pilot (precursor to smart phone), internet radio, desktop internet appliance, modem technology-based conference phone, and more. We were proud of our pioneering efforts. Lots of wins.

Losses were usually just having technology that wasn't perfected for the marketplace. Though failures at the time, it doesn't mean that they were bad ideas, just premature for the market. Yet, they often live on in different forms, at different companies, in different market conditions.

On a personal level, I have been caught by high-tech layoffs three separate times. Not because we were not doing great in my areas. Most times the company was taking a nose-dive for other reasons (product, market, supply chain). You have heard about the baby getting thrown out with the bathwater and that is what happens sometimes in layoff conditions. I lost on those days, then went on to recover and improve my situation.

Section 21 /=/ My Ladder Lessons \=

No one bats 1,000 % but try for a high average.

Hate failure, but know it is going to happen.

Learn from failure and succeed with your experience.

Take your calculated risks and realize that failure is inevitable.

Don't be afraid to fail.

Be afraid of failing too much.

Build success like a pyramid, block by block. Some blocks get damaged and discarded.

Create a legacy of trial, error, success, and achievement.

Never give up on your journey.

Section 22 /=/ **Live Within Your Means** \=\

I have always wanted to live within my means. For years, I have seen people stretch themselves for status symbols. I have never cared about “Keeping up with the Joneses”.

I have seen people spend more for their cars and live in a shared apartment so they could look good on the highway and in the parking lot. I have seen people stretch to have the biggest house yet not be able to afford furniture to put in it.

In one case, I knew a guy who purchased one of the most prestigious mansions on the north shore of Chicago (right up against Lake Michigan). He wanted the bragging rights, which he had for a year or two. He did not get to enjoy those for long as his business suffered, and he lost it. He did not have a safe zone.

In another case, I knew a guy who again, had a great house. In his case, it was all based on a business deal he had with a big company (with his independent machine shop). The big company changed their contract causing the loss of their business as a customer and ultimately the loss of his home. He didn't have a safe zone either.

Don't get me wrong, stretching is good. Just have a good chance at it working. The first place my wife and I purchased was a small 2-bedroom home. We pulled out all the stops to be able to afford a \$25,000 purchase in 1973. My wife worked two jobs and I put in as much overtime as I could. I also sold as many car parts as I could to build up our cash. We did it and were there for five years (73-78).

Our family was growing, and we needed more space, so we looked to upgrade to a single-family home and stretched to purchase a place for \$65,000 (we sold our old place for \$50K). We ended up doubling our mortgage payment from \$200/month to \$400/month. We were scared and had to bet on the fact that my income was going up proportionately with my career ladder. That plan worked. We lived in our second place from 78-87.

While at Apple, I again wanted to expand our surroundings. My daughters were growing, and I wanted some more space. I started to think about where to move. There was an overlapping matter. My mom was living in a run-down place that I was constantly working on for her. As it turned out, she lived on a spot that a developer wanted for a shopping center. One thing led to another and she was able to sell it for a good price. No one would ever have paid to live in it; it was a tear down.

In parallel, the original Bell family home, to which she had no claim from their divorce, was in foreclosure and in need of some major work. I was able to intercept it from foreclosure and purchased it myself by taking a second mortgage out on my home. I then rehabbed the home and put her in it, mortgage free. I was also able to purchase the vacant lot right next door and we built our family home (where it stands today). I moved mom into her home in 1986, we moved in next door in 1987. I was able to watch over my mom until she died in 2016.

Today, my wife and I live in a modest three-bedroom townhouse in Chesapeake, Virginia. Nothing extravagant, just comfortable.

Through all of that, we lived within our means, stretched to the next level, and normalized into our new means. Those plans all worked great and we never had a big problem.

Section 22 // **My Ladder Lessons** \=

Stretching is good. Just don't create a financial burden for yourself.

Anticipate your earnings and make sure your plan's trajectory will work.

What is your Plan B (safe zone), if needed?

You should be proud of your lifestyle, and it doesn't have to be extravagant.

Stay humble and don't get excess you can't afford.

Stay focused and comfortable for your means.

Careful not to overreach.

Make sure you can afford furniture.

Section 23 /=/ **Stress Reduction** \=\

You have come a long way. You have worked hard, achieved things, made your mark, built a solid reputation. The pressure can get to you and hurt you if you let it.

What are you doing for stress relief? Got a hobby? Active in sports? Like to exercise? Enjoy cars or boats?

Relaxation is in the mind of the beholder. While at Canon, I had a very good Japanese friend who was a great fly fisherman. I have had friends who were pilots, skydivers, raced cars, exercised, played sports, participated in theater, or sang.

One friend of mine had the hobby of power lifting and he was very good at it; he was a huge guy. He tired of that (I think because he was hurting himself too much) and went into baseball as his new hobby. He slimmed down in baseball to the point where I did not even recognize him, probably at half the body weight he once had. These hobbies gave him relief and something to look forward to outside of work.

Earlier, I wrote about the GM who hired me to turn things around and that we have been friends ever since. He had very cool hobbies. He drove race cars, flew planes, even helicopters. He was enjoying his hobbies until a couple of very scary things happened with a race car and a helicopter. After discussion with his wife, he dropped both those hobbies, yet still flies his own plane.

I bowled, played darts, softball, and had a home gym I built where I could lift weights, do yoga, treadmill, bike, or just relax. These are times for your body and mind. Just things that can allow relaxation and your mind to focus.

One time I had a significant budget problem at work that I had to solve. A simple pleasure of mine was mowing the lawn on my lawn tractor. I would listen to music on my earphones, or sometimes just think. One weekend while mowing, I just kept thinking about that budget problem and ended up solving it. The relaxation time just allowed me to focus on problem-solving.

These days, I have a small antique car collection, motorcycle, and small boat. I try to get out whenever I can and enjoy my “me” time.

The idea here is that you must find some way to some personal time. The time when you are by yourself, maybe even without your spouse or kids, just time to yourself. Golf was never for me because I was bad at it and it would take too much time away from my family for me to improve. I couldn't keep that pace.

Stress reduction is a form of therapy and helps you recharge your batteries. If you find something you love to do, and it is reasonably affordable and not dangerous, then enjoy.

Section 23 // **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Everyone needs to recharge his or her batteries from time to time.

Your relaxation time can be alone or with others (including family).

Make sure it is part of your normal activities.

Change it up, don't be routine, let your mind and body adapt.

Be careful about your hobbies and make sure what you do relieves stress, not inadvertently increases it.

Apply your renewed energy to your work and home.

Keep your hobbies safe and affordable (even from a time perspective).

Mow the lawn, it's good thinking time.

Section 24 /=/ **Family Harmony** \=\

My mom's family were gypsies. I'm not kidding, they were gypsies, with roots tracked back to the Basque region of France (by the border of Spain). I did not know this until I was in my 60s, and always wondered why my mom liked red with glittering adornment so much. Heck, I remember she had castanets, and if she had also pulled out a tambourine, I would know why.

Since we had very little, nothing stopped her from working VERY hard to support us and provide a normal childhood after my father died when I was seven. She took us all around the country, seeing the sights. She wanted to make sure that we did not miss out on things that other kids were getting.

I learned from her and wanted to be a good provider for my wife and kids. My wife felt the same way so that is what we did. Taking the lead from my mom, we took our kids all over the country seeing the sights.

I spent the time at work when needed and spent the time at home when needed. I did not gamble with our home, though I admire those who gamble with added mortgages to launch their businesses. That just was not for me.

I never wanted to be an MIA dad. My wife and I were there at soccer, basketball, scouts, dances, anything where my family needed to have parental support. Heck, one time our oldest daughter thought it was so uncool for her parents to be at her school event, she applied social distancing to us (long before COVID-19 standards).

Keeping your family safe and happy does not mean extravagance or excess. I did not own a new car until my 40s. My kids always drove used cars, even when their friends drove new ones. I placed value in other places than brand new and shiny: safety first, glitter later. Buying used is a smart move, but the (bad) joke was once on me. My daughter was going to college and many of her friends were driving new cars when she had a used one. She kept asking for something better. My response was "You'll have to drive this till the wheels fall off." Little did I know that the wheel

was literally going to fall off one day (and it did, on the highway). I got her a newer (not new) car.

I think we can learn from our environments and our parents, hopefully in a good way. I think it's important to pass that on to our kids.

Here's where I get sappy and talk about my wife Patty. She and I met in high school, fell in love and we have been together ever since. You hear about soulmates and that's what we are. We have had a great life together and I couldn't have done anything talked about in this book without her support. Thank you, Patty, for making my life great and complete. I love you.

Then, there are my daughters Rachael and Bridget. Patty and I couldn't be happier about how they turned out and grew into great, responsible adults. When young, they never had to be reminded to do their homework. They had their squabbles but nothing abnormal. They both went on to college and had great careers of their own. Now they're both parents and have provided us with four great grandchildren (Harrison, Simone, Gavin, and Amelie) who we love dearly. We think we did pretty good as parents and the proof is in the pudding. We love our girls and couldn't be any prouder of them both.

I can tell you that a great family life helped me with my career more than you can imagine.

Section 24 /=/ My Ladder Lessons \=

Family harmony is as important as it gets.

Safety and comfort are more valuable than most possessions.

What's right for you and your family may not be right for others.

It is OK to treat yourself and family from time to time if it makes sense.

Make sure you balance your time as much as possible and ensure that you have good family time.

Your family will be there for you when a job is not.

Don't let the wheels fall off.

Section 25 /=/ Volunteerism \=\

I have been involved in many community organizations and boards. In fact, at the time of writing this book, I am leading a nonprofit technology council and a business leader group. I have reduced my board activity to only these two and that is enough for me at this age.

I never got started with volunteerism until I was in my fifties. I reached a point where I thought I had amassed a good deal of knowledge and experience, so I wanted to give back. I recollect talking to my boss about it and he smiled and said, “Be careful, they can bleed you dry.” Even though I was naïve about such things, I decided to give it a try.

I started with a regional community leadership group, completed their program, led a graduate project to help the homeless (to date, it is their best project ever). That triggered earning a seat on the board for two terms. Then another (higher level) regional leaders’ program and the same thing happened. Good performance, another board role for two terms. Then a regional business leader group, a workforce development council, housing for the homeless council, a mediation center, economic development authority, crime prevention, and more. This happened with board after board, even becoming president of some.

Before you get involved, think about several things. Are you a good fit for the group and its mission? What do they want you to do? What is the group and board reputation? How much time can you commit? Do you believe in its mission and does it align with your values?

When you think about boards, think about what many boards need. They need your experience, sometimes leadership, sometimes money, sometimes fund-raising assistance (your connections). None of this is bad, it is just the nature of things.

One of the senior statesman in Hampton Roads (SE corner Virginia), was responsible for launching many car dealerships in the area decades ago. He was truly admired and loved. In one board

meeting, he was telling us a story about fund-raising and that he was never afraid to ask his friends for money. He said, "It got so bad that when people saw me walking up the sidewalk toward them, they'd cross to the other side." That never stopped him; he knew how to cross the street too.

Working on boards and in the community is a very good thing to do under the right circumstances and for the right people. You might be the right person, you might not. Be sure-footed.

I will tell you this; helping in your community can be a very emotionally fulfilling endeavor if you want to contribute, give something back, add to your legacy and do good things.

Section 25 /=/ **My Ladder Lessons** \=\

Working in a nonprofit is different and can be emotionally rewarding if they support things you believe in. Nonprofits rely heavily on boards.

Compensation is not as high in many cases.

Community and Board work is needed in almost all areas. Most are nonprofit groups and need your expertise and experience.

The high-level ones usually have a solid funding stream. The lower-end ones may not.

Be willing to help fund-raise with your connections. Just be judicious in the use of your connections (or they will get tired of hearing from you).

Don't just fill a seat to put it on your resume.

Find out where they need you and contribute as needed.

Be sure-footed about what group you join and make sure their mission and yours both align.

Don't over-extend yourself, taking away valuable time from your business or relationships.

You will meet new friends and business acquaintances along the way, so enjoy the experience.

Volunteerism is a supplemental add-on to your career, only if it is right for you at the right time.

Section 26 /=/ It's Up to You \=\

I hope you have enjoyed my stories and perhaps picked something up or confirmed what you already knew.

Your career ladder is YOUR responsibility (rung by rung and I hope not wrong by wrong). Success will not be gifted; it needs to be earned. It won't be easy unless you were born into greatness. Even then, you must work hard to earn your place in the world.

There is a saying that I have believed in for years, "Either lead, follow, or get out of the way." In my career, I have done all of that. I have led when I could. I have followed when I should. I have gotten out of the way if I needed to. Your success may be based on how you apply these principles. The experienced workforce may already know this. The up-and-coming workforce may not, and for them, I hope they take these things as seriously as they can.

Consider identifying successful role models who could act as mentors via personal meetings, phone calls and emails. Getting reality checks, getting opinions and validation is great.

Arnold Schwarzenegger has had a tremendous career in bodybuilding, movies, and politics albeit with some mistakes along the way. One of his early bodybuilding movies was *Stay Hungry*. Ask yourself how hungry you are to succeed. Are you willing to put in the time and effort and not trash yourself and others along the way? I do not believe in success at all costs.

Teamwork is as important as anything you have read thus far. Being part of a team is great. Leading a team is great. Leading a great team is the best.

The future workforce in our country translates to our collective success as a nation. To achieve your own personal success, learn how to climb YOUR ladder. Focus on each rung and minimize the wrongs.



GOOD LUCK!

Supplemental Reading

Eight of Dan's previously published regionalism blog posts.

I was a contributing author for my region's business paper in which I wrote several opinion pieces on developing a stronger regional economy.

1) Economic Engines Have Many Cylinders

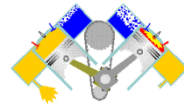
October 30, 2013

Much has been communicated on job creation and workforce development, in the country, state and region.



We hear about the job fairs, workforce development boards and all the associated activity for preparing the workforce. ALL that is necessary.

Yet there still seems to be lag in understanding what is needed from a high level, or a delay in achieving the desired results of job growth (to accept the output of workforce development).



General Theories to Explore

1. Preparing the workforce is a great idea but unless more jobs are created, we'll have a massive funnel of qualified workers waiting for opportunities, working in jobs for which they are clearly overqualified, or leaving the region.
2. We also need to focus on creating the business environment to create jobs: Creating new companies and accelerating growth of existing companies.

I often think of mechanical analogies. In this case, I think of our economy as an economic engine that has multiple cylinders. In the best case, each cylinder is doing its thing, and working in tandem with other cylinders. If one cylinder is not firing, or running at lesser power levels than the other, the engine will not achieve peak performance and power output levels

I offer that the job creation (Business) and workforce development (Education) are two of the six cylinders in our economic engine. The other four cylinders are our Tourism Industry, the Port, the Military and Regional Cohesion (this one a work in progress).

Many believe that our economic engine requires (at least) a tune-up. With the idea in mind of tuning our engine cylinder by cylinder, let's consider the first two of Workforce Development and Job Creation. Like an engine needs fuel, compression, and spark to create power, our engine needs its own basic elements to produce power (growth).

Shifting away from the engine cylinder analogy, let's look at a more common theme, Supply and Demand.

The four basic laws of supply and demand are:

1. If demand increases and supply remains unchanged, a worker shortage occurs. Therefore, it's necessary to focus on workforce development.
2. If demand remains unchanged and supply decreases, a worker shortage occurs. Again, workforce development is needed.
3. If demand decreases and supply remains unchanged, a worker surplus occurs. Therefore, we need to ensure that we have a flexible workforce that can adapt to a changing employment market as the business environment changes.
4. If demand remains unchanged and supply increases, a worker surplus occurs. Then our workforce leaves the region. This why we need to focus on both supply and demand simultaneously.

Two Goals in Balance

1. Grow business to need the jobs.
2. Develop the workforce to be ready for the jobs when they open.

Growing Businesses

The country and region need to focus on business startups and emerging business growth. What does it take to make that happen?

1. Start-up programs like Start Norfolk and Hatch need to happen region wide. Those business programs need to be favorable to the fledgling companies to optimize success and not at too high a cost.

2. Regional Economic Gardening programs that help accelerate the growth of emerging companies – those that have made it through their start-up phase and are now in a growth mode.

Much work needs to be done to create the environment, culture, and ecosystem to optimize business growth in both these dimensions. Young companies need help; guidance, mentorship, experiential learning and more from those that have made it. Not at the cost of turning over percentages of ownership but from those that are truly interested in both business and regional economic growth.

Who should do it? Existing businesses should consider taking on young companies under their wing. Not for financial support per debut for all other areas of support (advice, direction, experience) to optimize the success of the young company.

Should cities opt in with financial incentives and stimulation? Well, sure but I believe that those opportunities are limited in the economic and fiscal climate we see today.

Let's look at other more creative methods; cooperative marketing, lead generation, shared infrastructure programs – whatever it takes to maximize profits via increased revenues and lower operational costs.

Do we have enough business smarts in our region to make this happen? We certainly do!

Examples to Drive Job Creation

1. Ensure that our economic development efforts (city by city), have a focus on emerging company business growth. Though financial incentives are hard to come by these days, what else can be done? Mentoring programs, experiential learning opportunities, introductions, marketing. All ideas to help the business grow.
2. Meet with and listen to the emerging companies who We would ask; "What are the top three things your city and region could do to help accelerate your growth?"
3. Cities should consider "Pay for Performance Programs" where incentives (tax incentives, other) are available for achieving growth in revenue and employment within a given city.

4. Cities should consider “Concierge Programs” for qualified businesses. This is the “one-stop-shop” city representation to run down any of the detail work necessary for that business to interface with the city.
5. Realize that business growth requires capital and that emerging companies need access to that capital. For businesses to succeed, they often need to borrow the funding to successfully market their company within the region but also outside the region, nationally if not internationally. Does our region attract the investment community into the region to help fund emerging company expansion?

Workforce Readiness (Education)

There’s LOTS of activity on this in our region. The question is not how much activity is taking place but how effective is it?

Talk to the technology companies who recently went zero for twelve in getting a qualified intern.

Talk to the companies who have candidates that don’t follow instructions, don’t dress the role, act the role, talk the role.

What is missing? The practical applications and attributes that employers are seeking.

This does not suggest that it’s always like, this. There are undoubtedly success stories.

However, I’m suggesting that at least in the high-tech sector, there are many opportunities to better prepare our workers. And those improvement opportunities can be applied to any business sector.

The answer is twofold: 1) An effective process of gathering employer feedback and building it into the education, training and counseling system, and 2) Measurements of those outcomes: Employer report cards by educational institution that provides feedback on the applicants from their school.

What can be done to create the workforce supply?

1. Ensure that our educational institutions create relevant, flexible, current programs (both hard and soft skills) to adapt to the changing business landscape (especially in high tech).
2. Create effective internship programs that give good candidates invaluable work experience and measure their progress.
3. Keep in tune with changing business demands – especially emerging business sectors – and make sure the workforce is prepared. Wayne Gretzky once said, “I skate to where the puck is going to be, not where it has been.”

Economic growth requires job growth. Business growth is what creates job growth. Effective workforce development fills those roles and makes it easier for the businesses to grow without rehiring and retraining workers; or worse, having to recruit from outside the region for those workers; or worst of all, having to leave the region to find a region with a better prepared workforce.

The solution is a dual pronged approach: It’s a matter of supply and demand.

Working together, we can build a very strong economic engine. Bigger, more powerful and firing on all cylinders.

-END-

2) Hampton Roads in Overtime

December 7, 2013

Given that we are in football season, let's reflect on what's going on in our region through some football analogies.

It would appear to me that Hampton Roads is in overtime. Overtime in the sense that We have dodged some economic bullets through the recession thanks to our economic pillars of the Military, Port and Tourism. Our 21st Century game is getting more serious and challenging than it has been in the past.

Tie game at the whistle. We are going into overtime and we must score points.

Are We Ready for the 5th Quarter!?

Field Conditions

Just like in any game, field conditions will play a role. Our field looks like this:

Sequestration and defense spending cuts can have a domino (ripple) effect in our economy. With reductions in the military and in related businesses, there's a huge negative impact in real \$\$s flowing through our economy.

Wikipedia has our Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) ranked as #37 out of 381 regions listed at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Metropolitan_Statistical_Areas.

37	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC Metropolitan Statistical Area	1,699,925	1,676,822	+1.38%
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We have hanging in there but run the risk of our regional population growth stagnating and being surpassed.

With 1.7M people and no clearly dominant city (realistically), We have succeeded to date because of our combined strength and inertia in various areas of economic performance. We are doing Korbust can lose ground (tax base, spending, etc.).

Policom at: <http://www.policom.com/metrorank.htm>, addresses the condition of an economy from the viewpoint of its impact upon the “standard of living” of the people who live and work in an area.

They list us at #28 in terms of regional economic strength (comparatively). That’s not too shabby especially when you look at the progress over the years.

Metropolitan Areas	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC (MSA)	28	25	42	90	63	61	33	46	43	59

The economic strength rankings are created so Policom can study the characteristics of strong and weak economies. The highest ranked areas have had rapid, consistent growth in both size and quality for an extended period. The lowest ranked areas have been in volatile declines for extended periods of time.

This should make sense since We have enjoyed a good cost of living in this region.

If you look at the report from the Mayor’s Conference measuring our Gross Metropolitan Product, we are #39.

36	San Antonio-New Braunfels, TX	87.2	92.0	94.1	99.0
37	Nashville-Davidson–Murfreesboro–Franklin, TN	84.9	91.1	95.5	100.3
38	Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, CT	84.7	86.3	88.4	92.4
39	Virginia Beach-Norfolk-Newport News, VA-NC	82.1	85.2	87.2	90.2
40	Hartford-West Hartford-East Hartford, CT	79.2	80.7	82.0	85.0
41	New Orleans-Metairie-Kenner, LA	74.3	80.2	83.0	86.2
42	Salt Lake City, UT	70.9	74.8	77.5	81.5
43	Providence-New Bedford-Fall River, RI-MA	67.3	69.5	71.2	73.9

This is a good thing on the surface, yet there’s more to the story.

Some distressing news from our friends at the Hampton Roads Planning District Commission (HRPDC at: <http://hrpdc.org/>): "Hampton Roads had the 39th largest economy in the U.S. in 2012, behind Milwaukee and Bridgeport, CT, and ahead of Hartford and New Orleans. This region has moved between being the 37th and the 40th largest region economically since the BEA began to estimate GMP in 2001."

“Unfortunately, when ranked by Per Capita Real GMP, Hampton Roads has a markedly lower rank of 83rd largest per capita gross product. This reflects a lower per capita level of productivity in this region, and a lower overall level of income. This is partly a result of this region's industry mix, as many of the regions with high per capita GMP feature either energy extraction, finance, center of governance, or high-tech startups as some of their major industries.”

“Additionally, several regions that have large tourism industries are lower in the ranking of per capita GMP, including Orlando (92nd) and Las Vegas (101st). While individuals often fall into the trap of focusing on the ranking of GMP, the most important data revolves around the growth in GMP, both for the overall economy, and particularly in terms of per capita GMP. It is the growth in output which indicates how the economic situation in the region is changing for its residents.”

Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) at: <http://www.bea.gov/>

Somewhat related information sets are found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virginia_locations_by_per_capita_income

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economy_of_Virginia

What this means is that we need higher paying jobs. Education prepares the workforce (in part) but then we need to employ them (not losing them to other regions where the higher paid professional roles exist).

SUMMARY OF OUR CURRENT POSITION

- We have done well as a region over the past several years. We are tied.
- Now we are in overtime and need to score points.
- It's not just about MSA. The fact that we are 37 is great but doesn't let us win by itself.
- It's not just about GMP. The fact that we are 39 is great but doesn't let us win by itself.
- Factor in Per Capita GMP. The fact that we are 83rd is bad and contributes to our not winning the game.

WE NEED A GAME PLAN

It's always good to have a strategy; one that makes the best sense for us (leveraging our strengths, overcoming our weaknesses).

1. We see that we need all our existing economic pillars to continue to thrive (Military, Port, and Tourism).
2. We need to build new pillars of private sector business (entrepreneurialism, technology sector development and all the related activity associated to those efforts).
3. Our region needs to be one where small business succeed and grow into medium businesses and larger. Queue up Angel investment \$\$\$s.
4. We need to drive the salary base higher which comes from the type of jobs that new technology sector growth brings.
5. We need to continue to support large businesses. As we get our collective act in order, we might even be able to attract larger businesses to come to Hampton Roads.
6. We need to raise our Per Capita GMP!

I think we are getting closer to creating a winning game plan, but we still need the team to grind out yardage on the field.

WE NEED THE RIGHT TEAM (REGIONAL FANTASY FOOTBALL) [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantasy_football_\(American\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fantasy_football_(American))

Now is the time to create a powerhouse team to score points and secure a victory. If we were to pick a team to maximize our chances of winning, what would it look like and who would be on it? Let's certainly play those who got us into overtime. We have a great team.

Good Coaching Staff

The Regional Study launched by the HR Community Foundation is a good reset effort for the region.

In fact, the related idea of the establishment of a new Regional Council (which hasn't met yet) is great too but it's time to get the show on the road. Otherwise, we'll continue to run plays but not gain yardage and score points.

No reason to delay even if we just meet to start the conversations and creative thoughts flowing and ultimately let leaders lead.

NO DELAY OF GAME

Our Backfield

They're still in the game. Military, Port and Tourism. We'll continue to run a good ground game with them.

Our Ends

Education and Workforce Development. Though we must play them some more to ensure that our workforce is best prepared with classroom and real-world skills.

Our Line

Both Chambers, HREDA, HRMMFA, CIVIC Leadership Reinvent Hampton Roads and Hampton Roads Innovation Collaborative.

Our Wide Receivers

Small business, tech companies and sector development. These are going to make the next big gains.

Our Quarterback

There remains a BIG question: Who's calling the plays?

We have a bit of a problem here. When many people are in charge you might as well have nobody in charge.

Too many hands on the tiller and you write your name in the ocean. No hands on the tiller and you go with the tides and winds.

The essence of our region has been a bit of this condition.

- We need a play caller (in a collaborative sense).
- We need some planned plays.
- We need to call some an audible every now and then.

Who? That is the big question. Perhaps an independent group who facilitates the conversation, cherry picks the right ideas, creates the plan, and delivers it to the collaborative entity for vetting. Certainly, that's an option.

We need people that will execute the plays. We call them Do-ers.

The Recipe for Success

1. An independent group to execute plans created by the Regional Council with the Foundation and CEO Roundtable.
2. A convener and facilitator.
3. A team builder to the private sector, elected officials, community, and academia sectors.
4. A regional mind.
5. A strategic mind.
6. An operational mind.
7. Dedication and focus.

WORDS INTO ACTION

Ideas and plans are great but without proper execution, they're worth the paper they're written on. We can't just "wish" the solution into happening. We need coordinated, cooperative execution.

1. We must organize and leverage our strengths.
2. We must create a new future for our region. One that looks different from today.
3. We need a common point of guidance. One that cross-communicates from the private business sector.
4. We need execution and results.

ASSESSING OUR STRENGTHS

We have got some strength to leverage in our favor.

- We have The Port, Tourism, Military, as well as Ship Building and Repair. Thanks to everyone working in those industries and please stay on your game...we need you.
- We have reasonable but not powerful/plentiful private sector business. They're doing their own thing and that's great. Lots of excellent examples but probably not enough to carry us over the goal line.
- We have great climate, reasonable cost of living, culture, museums, city life, country life, and schools.
- Community College and University presence is strong, but we need to work closer with them so that they know the right targets in terms of workforce needs.
- Transportation issues are being addressed slowly and surely (can't do it all at once though).

- Those Entrepreneurs need to focus on success, and we want them to stay strong in the region. We want them to grow and illustrate that small and medium sized business can thrive in this area.

I think there are opportunities where we can help them succeed. We'll talk about that in a moment. We have renewed interest in growing our economy with the Hampton Roads Community Foundation and the CEO Roundtable stepping in to help.

We have some very progressive, forward thinking, regionally minded people who are ready to engage.

With all that, there still seems to be lack of cohesiveness, decisiveness and worse yet, ACTION.

PREDICTION

Predictions are always made everywhere, why not here too?

- Military will be downsized and play less of a role in our regional economy (though still huge).
- The Port will thrive. Bring on those big boats. But the advantage will only be 2-3 years.
- Tourism will improve as people get more discretionary \$\$s to go relax in a cool area like ours.
- Transportation will improve as road and bridge projects get funded and built. Light Rail and High-Speed Rail too!
- Now the long yardage play. Hampton Roads will be known for a great place to launch and grow a business.
- The touchdown play. New technology sectors will be organized, supported, and marketed. Venture capital will come back to our region and we'll launch like a rocket from Wallops Island.

Game Over – Hampton Roads Wins!

BACK TO REALITY

The predictions are a great visual to keep in our minds. However, we are just now starting to get back to the field in overtime.

Let's Play Ball Hampton Roads!

-END-

3) Building a Better Workforce

January 2014

There is so much being done in workforce development, yet in some cases, businesses are still indicating that the system of preparing the workforce is not producing the results.

My most recent (2013) personal experience is related to creating an internship program for a local Technology Consortium.

In one case, we had a zero for twelve success rate on intern candidates. We had to shift to a different school where the results were better, though nothing to write home about.

Examples of the deficiencies are:

1. Failure to follow instructions: ALL intern candidates were asked to supply resumes but only about 30% did so.
2. Too much textbook, not enough practical skills: An IT intern candidate could not identify "the router" in the IT equipment room.
3. Lack of preparation: An intern came into the interview and asked the company owner to tell him about the company.
4. Not dressed for success: Some showed up dressed unprofessionally.

There are plenty of examples out there.

What are the dynamics that might be occurring that contribute to this condition?

College Process Auto Pilot?

Most colleges are indicating that they have programs. However, to what extent are the programs that effective?

Are the schools managing a closed loop system where success of interns is measured (both short term and longer term)?

Are the businesses participating in the preparation of workforce effectively via feedback?

Are the schools accepting that feedback and modifying programs appropriately?

Business Process Auto Pilot?

Some companies are simply expecting higher results from the college system but perhaps are not contributing to the process for improvements.

When businesses are at a point that they are considering uprooting and relocation to a better workforce market, we might want to adapt a regional sense and jump up, get a meeting at the college and stand on a desk until someone is listening.

Additionally, we should be taking an active role in creating an improved program.

Clearly, there is a call for improvement with business, college and students sharing culpability.

Let's consider some opportunities to move the needle in the right direction.

The 21st century business models are different from before. Let's consider an Internship Program Overhaul.

Virtual vs. Physical

Workers are often working "virtually". What this means is that businesses are in some cases not investing as much in "brick and mortar" physical presence. This could possibly translate to insufficient space for interns to work in. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Legalities

There are many legalities and tax ramifications that could be prohibitive to small and medium sized businesses adding interns. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Financials

Effective programs should be intended to assist with many, not few. Yet it is a financial burden to suggest that businesses (alone) support the financial element of effective internship programs. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Efficiencies

Businesses often don't have the resources needed to manage the internship resources. This contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Changing Business Needs

At least in technology, the world moves fast and there are a lot of changes.

Any workforce development program **MUST** have built in flexibility and adaptability to conform to those changing dynamics. To not adapt, contributes to lack of scalability for any internship program.

Virtual 21st Century Internship Model

Let's consider a new and scalable model for preparing our workforce with real world practical skills. It requires a newly defined partnership between business and education.

Possible Goals:

1. Create better ties between education and business to best prepare workforce for employability.
2. Impact maximum number of students' possible (scalability).
3. Create a program with closed loop measurements of results.

Ideas:

1. Create a list of participating schools and companies in Hampton Roads.
2. Schools would organize participating students in a Virtual Internship Program.
3. Schools would provide a physical place (intern workspace), where they can work on programs or projects
4. If projects are real for the company, interns would be paid no less than minimum wage. If projects are simulated, it could be considered pure education, and not paid.
5. Projects could be hybrids from virtual intern space at colleges or a mix of on-site at business location as needed.

6. High performing students could be a "hiring pool" for the future needs of the company.
7. Businesses would provide some level of college on-site mentoring (hard and soft skills they're looking for and differentiation opportunities).
8. Businesses could provide some workplace tours and conversations with existing employees about what it's like to work at the company.

Think of the possibilities if we truly had business and education working in unison to create real-world, practical application programs to assist in our region's workforce development.

Traditional efforts have been great thus far but it's a new world from many different perspectives.

-END-

4) The Spirit of the Entrepreneur

March 3, 2014

Just look around. Corporations aren't giving out gold watches anymore. Where members of our older generations would often work at one job their entire career, members of our younger generations often change jobs several times during their careers.

What's going on? The global and national economies are changing. Those economic changes are creating the need for businesses to adapt to compete in the 21st Century.

Those adaptations include how businesses look at the workforce and workplace. It's virtual, creative, collaborative, and young. Yet, the younger generation is facing employment challenges that haven't been seen before.

In Hampton Roads, it's not uncommon to hear that people anticipate needing to move out of the region because there just aren't enough jobs to keep them here. An additional challenge for college students is having to compete for jobs in an area that produces 12,000+ exiting military each year.

Companies are looking for ways to grow, not by the number of people they hire but by the efficiencies of revenue per employee and as always, shareholder returns.

There is no one answer other than to simply adapt and press on in the new reality of the present which requires in part, to think differently.

Adapting to change and learning how to find your niche and market is incredibly important for anyone in today's employment marketplace.

Several regional groups have been working on projects with entrepreneurs because we believe that this is a big part of our future.

Many believe that entrepreneurs help our economy (where the growth is going to happen), and are willing to mentor other

businesses as well as students, setting expectations via practical, experience-based logic.

I would like to call out and thank the Entrepreneur's Organization (EO) who has members that are leading by example and contributing more to our area's economy than many may know. Collaborating with EO, we have offered several creative programs to assist young businesses and students in our region.

I am of the belief that as a region, we must create a business environment that is conducive for success and growth of young businesses. We call that environment the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem. This is an environment of leverage and value. A quick read from an organization trying to help is at <http://socaleed.org/approach/>.

Jim Clifton, Chairman & CEO of Gallup, describes a critical element associated with the success of entrepreneurs in his recently published book, **The Coming Jobs War**. He believes that "mentors are the heroes America needs for this moment who will guide, advise, and encourage small businesses to success."

The Entrepreneurial Ecosystem focuses on helping companies accelerate their growth and hopefully, make it to the higher levels of corporate performance.

Enter HRIC (Hampton Roads Innovation Collaborative). HRIC is a new iteration of the Technology Business Consortium (originally formed in 1998). HRIC has expanded the scope to include virtual acceleration efforts for all innovation companies but primarily focused on companies who can export products and services external to our region.

HRIC will bring business accelerators to the region. Business accelerators (like the TV show Shark Tank) take existing businesses (in business for a few years and have a revenue stream), who are interested in taking their business to greater heights with the infusion of investor capital (usually in exchange for equity).

Further, HRIC, collaborating with others, will introduce the concept of business simulators to college students in our region. Business simulators will assist in bridging the gap between education and

business with students working on practical, real-world business challenges from the accelerator component.

HRIC will offer these accelerators and simulators throughout the region to assist business, students and teachers in adapting to the 21st Century business model.

See Microsoft's BizSpark effort at: <http://www.microsoft.com/bizspark/> which is a free program dedicated to startups.

Disney Accelerator, which will be based in Los Angeles and powered by Techstars, is now accepting applications from early-stage companies with innovative consumer media and entertainment product ideas.

If we want the economy to grow, we have to invest in our future. We invest in roads, bridges and rails. We need to invest in the Entrepreneurial Spirit.

The challenges for our cities is to adapt to the change necessary to compete in the 21st Century. The book Metropolitan Revolution by Bruce Katz speaks to much of these concepts.

"The real power to change America lies in our cities and metros." — Mayor Rahm Emanuel, Chicago

Hampton Roads: Let's create the Entrepreneurial Ecosystem to support the growth sectors for our future. Along with way, let's support the younger workforce and knowledge workers that will be carrying the economic ball forward.

The world has and will continue to change. Those who don't adapt will most assuredly be left behind.

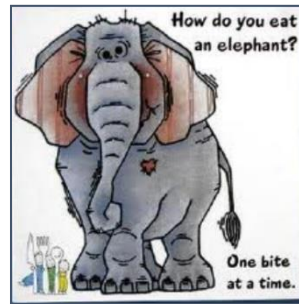
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5) Eating the Regional Elephant

April 2014

There's an old saying about how to eat an elephant. The answer is "One Bite at a Time".

Having been in the regional business game for a few years now, I could have very easily said, "This is futile, I'm out of here." Or like Cartman from South Park, "#@!* you guys, I'm going home." Don't worry, not happening.



As I reflect on the past 30 years of our region, I see many outstanding efforts from a variety of organizations. The people involved in these efforts realized then that there is nothing fast or easy about moving a region in a positive direction.

However, people say that we have too many organizations, we are over-reliant on certain elements of our economy (Port, Military, and Tourism) that our growth is stunted or ready to suffer and that we get in each other's way. Some will even say that we are not cool.

Well, some of that is true but let's focus on the positive (which I think is always helpful). Hampton Roads is a GREAT PLACE and if we continue the themes of working together and modernizing our area, our region will be even better than it is today.

In my opinion, there are some great signs that we are realizing our future needs to be shaped and in fact, acting!

Check out these two (albeit a little dated) videos: [Hampton Roads 1](#) and [Hampton Roads 2](#). You'll see that we have a great deal to offer. That's just a start and we are going to update those pieces of work very soon to share with the world!

Over the past decades, our region has evolved to become a wonderful place to live, work and play. Organizations have popped up in many cases to fill voids in our regional culture. Over time, just like in business, the competitive marketplace creates a condition that allows some to succeed and others to fail. That's business.

Yet bite by bite, we are eating the regional elephant and working to reduce our regional problems. Sometimes, though, we must step back to get a better view of the activity.

Bite: Cities are evolving based on their competitive needs but that raises the bar for other cities to also compete. Excellent!

Bite: The region is working on rail connectivity (light and high speed), along with the federal and state government. Outstanding!

Bite: Roads and bridges are getting improved. Wonderful!

Bite: More mixed-use town center developments are getting developed. Awesome!

Bite: We are focusing on the economic development and competitiveness of our region. Fantastic!

Bite: We are beginning to realize that stimulating growth of small business to second stage and beyond will create jobs. Terrific!

Bite: The technology sector is getting more and more regional attention as a high growth opportunity everywhere, including our region. Brilliant!

Bite: We are working to mentor and help the younger generation understand the business and political landscape to enable them to be our future regional leaders. Tremendous!

Bite: Our cost of living and tax base is remaining attractive compared to many other areas of the country. Thank You!

Bite: Our climate, geography, culture, and history makes our area such a great place to live and raise a family. OK, never mind about this winter, it's SPRING!

Bite: We are doing TEDx's again. NASA did a couple on the Peninsula a few years back, but new entrepreneurs are launching them again, this time on the Southside! Look at [TEDx Great Bridge](#) to see a recurring series of Women in Hampton Roads and Youth. Watch of the combination TEDx/Enabling Next Gen Symposium planned for October 16, 2014. We are looking for ways to stop

Brain Drain and maintain Brain Gain in our area. We hope this to be a recurring, annual program to achieve progressive advancement. Fantastic!

Bite: We are taking Economic Competitiveness VERY seriously. Talk to the [Entrepreneurs Organization](#) to see how over 50 area companies, \$2B in regional revenue and over 4,000 employees are looking to get involved and contribute to area strategy development from companies who are succeeding and growing. Monumental!

Get the picture? We are working on addressing the problems. We are trying to diversify our economy. We have got actions and activity that are focused on many of the right areas.

Our region is working to compete. Working to be a better place. Perhaps we'll never be a Silicon Valley, Austin, wherever. Perhaps we need not worry to be like somewhere else (per se) but cherry pick what works for this region and place a small number of very good, strategic bets. We are getting there. We are eating that regional elephant one bite at a time.

Who's doing all this? No one group. It's the collaboration of private and public sector participants who truly want to make a difference. Those who truly are going to try and move the needle.

We need help from everywhere. This is a big elephant and one that's been around for a long time. Old habits change slowly.

We need to prioritize. We need to balance. We need to make sure-footed progress. None of this happens immediately and none of this happens without a cost.

Our generations (younger to older) need to work together and learn from one another to advance our collective cause.

We must all realize that standing still is the worst answer. We need to be actively eating that regional elephant bite by bite. The more people at the table, working together, the faster our big challenges will be reduced.

American author Robert Fulghum's quote sticks with me: "The grass is not, in fact, always greener on the other side of the fence. Fences have nothing to do with it. The grass is greenest where it is watered."

Our regional leaders from decades ago got it right. Cities will always be cities and have their interests at heart. That's what makes them compete and raise the bar for everyone else. However, the region is the fabric in which we all exist. Working together to create regional solutions, even if it's city by city, it is how we win the larger game.

Now, who's hungry enough to pull up a chair at the table?

-END-

6) Knitting a Regional Quilt

May 27, 2014

As you might detect from some of my previous articles, I'm relatively optimistic about our regional direction and future. I think that there are some excellent examples of advancement if we just look around.

Yet with that in mind, we still need to keep the pedal-to-the-metal if we want to make up for lost ground and achieve the competitive position we'll need for the future.

We need to make sure that we continue to knit our regional quilt so that it's connected, inclusive and protective.

The state is participating. Governor McAuliffe has been to Hampton Roads many times during his campaign and that trend continues. Whether it's through transportation, business, or other, there seems to be a commitment to "unlocking" Hampton Roads.

Cities need to continue identifying what will enhance their position - what will be needed in their localities to attract business, appeal to millennials, expand their tax base and retain a high quality of life. In business, I learned to always keep my eye on the competition - sometimes to see what you might want to do; sometimes what you might NOT want to do. But watching others develop around you will often provide the impetus and motivation to also seek advancement (within the means of any given city). To those cities engaging and progressing, THANK YOU for what you do.

To our existing economic pillars of military, shipping, and tourism; THANK YOU for what you do. So many of us in the region are in your corner. Please let us know if we are supporting you correctly. What else is needed? How can we help?

Large and medium sized businesses need to continue with profitable, healthy operations as their priority, of course. They help generate jobs. If I have one thing to ask, it's that they continue to recognize and acknowledge the importance of their intellectual contribution to the regional quilt (whatever that may be). We need business to participate, and in many cases, they already are (and with our thanks).

I still believe we need more fabric and thread. Let's consider some of the following:

New Opportunities for Our Region

Clearly, we are trying to invent new opportunities for our businesses. The Hampton Roads Community Foundation has stood up several study groups that are doing deep-dives on: Leadership, Entrepreneurism, Industry Clusters and Workforce Development. Certainly, the value of their output remains to be seen but at least their dialogue can lead to progress as part of our regional quilt.

There's also a great deal going on with the concept of creating "ecosystems" for entrepreneurs. This is because successful small and medium sized businesses are needed as part of our regional quilt. "Ecosystem" is a cool buzzword for creating an environment for success, comprised of some really good ideas coming forward which will attract the attention and support of state and local government, business, and communities. Part of that ecosystem requires academic support as well. If you're paying attention to announcements of late, that support is coming forward. But additionally, it needs business, finance, connectivity, incubators, accelerators, business simulators (for workforce development), cities (if they choose but we can't wait), general community, industry cluster evaluation, and (please) marketing of our region to the country and world (regardless of our naming convention). Now THAT'S a great piece of fabric to add to our quilt!

There're more and more new infrastructure ideas out there. Stadiums, rail systems (light and high speed) are all being discussed and acted upon. Sometimes the solutions being discussed aren't perfect but at least their being discussed and maybe, just maybe, those plans will evolve, improve, and become reality.

Another area of interest is that of regional land use. I have recently become involved with Urban Land Institute Hampton Roads, and the amount of value-added opportunity their resources bring to the region is amazing. So much of our regional development relates to land use. Transportation (rail lines, stations, bus routes) ties to land use. Mixed use developments, roads and highways, sea level, city plans, hotels - all are part of that discussion.

The Best Bonding Agent: Interested and Active Citizens

I believe Hampton Roads has an amazing number of examples of philanthropy, commitment, and effort. I tip my hat to all.

What would be a great addition is to get more involved in regional efforts. To be clear, there are groups out there with focused presence - Virginia Beach Vision, Greater Norfolk Corporation, Chesapeake Alliance, Portsmouth Partnership and more, I'm sure. These groups are helping their cities via very specific actions, thoughts, voices, and ideas. Would not it be great if they were to also talk to one another on occasion? Not to diminish their own city efforts but to share and expand our regional progress.

At Future of Hampton Roads, we had five focus areas:

- 1) **Regional Cooperation:** Helping to get our municipalities (and organizations) to talk, share and advance with regional quilt in mind. Our collective strength is greater than our individual strength.
- 2) **Transportation:** Supporting effective regional mobility plans (which are now extensive).
- 3) **Economic Competitiveness:** Assisting in the establishment of an Entrepreneurial Ecosystem including Business-to-Business Mentoring as well as process and systems to start and grow young companies. Organically grow jobs and add to our regional economic strength.
- 4) **Metropolitan Synergy:** Helping to ensure that our Peninsula friends are part of our regional quilt.
- 5) **Enabling Next Generation Success:** What can we do to help our millennials succeed and take over the reins?



Trust me when I tell you that none of this is easy. As one would expect, we have a variety of opinions and recommendations of approach. But dialogue typically allows us to set our path.

I'm interested in all (obviously)but I have really been immersed of late in working with millennials. We are putting together plans for a major event in the fall (a TEDx actually) and related workgroup sessions with many from our younger generations.

So much of what I have learned is about letting them participate and lead in creating what it is that they want (for their own future). It appears to me that they don't want someone else's reality thrust upon them but rather, they want to create and/or define their own future (since they're the ones who will be living it). Yet everything needs to be balanced with the reality that there are systems in place that sometimes change slowly, and trust is required in and from both camps.

Our process committee is doing well (now). But we had to find our way, learn about each other, and be open to sharing, learning and compromise. It's working based on effort. If it works here, and considering this as a microcosm, then what can we do to apply this approach to larger, broader scale? More to come on this topic.

All of what I have discussed (and more) contributes to the Hampton Roads regional quilt.

- Keep the state involved and helping, recognize the cities need to keep driving their agendas (with injections of regional cooperation).
- Maintain the strength of our pillars to keep them going strong.
- Add new opportunities to supplement our existing economy.
- Support the work of certain groups who are attempting to maintain and strengthen our regional quilt.
- Attract engaged and energetic people to jump in to get things done.
- Engage millennials and let them have a voice in the future. Huge voices on transportation, lifestyle, developments and more.
- Think locally AND regionally (they're not always mutually exclusive). Allocate a percentage of what you do to the region to help stitch things together.

Certainly, no one has all the answers (especially this author). However, in my 11 years in the region, I am seeing the regional quilt evolve. There's still some old ways but plenty of new ones arising.

It's an exciting time to be here, don't you think? We may not be a single cloth or fabric, but quilts can work well too. We just have to stitch all the right pieces together.

-END-

7) The Hampton Roads Idea Bank

August 20, 2014

“Everything that can be invented has been invented.” Charles H. Duel, Commissioner, U.S. patent office, 1899 (attributed).



Although this is in urban myth, the idea that someone would be so shortsighted as to think nothing else could ever be invented is fodder for great conversation.

There will never be a shortage of ideas. The core concept here is that ideas are perpetual. TED (Technology, Entertainment and Design) has lots of people coming forward with great ideas. Take a look at TED.com

What does that mean to us as citizens of Hampton Roads? Let’s consider the opportunities our region has in front of us.

- We can consider how to diversify our economy.
- We can consider new business sectors to help
- We can consider how to create economic growth with (among other methods) entrepreneurship and small business growth.
- We can consider how to slow our brain drain and convert to brain gain.
- We can consider how to create regional transit mobility.
- We can consider how to act as a region and not independent cities.
- We can consider things that we haven’t even talked about yet.

You get the point, I’m sure. We certainly have lots to think about and probably haven’t even put a dent in it the overall thought dome yet.

Next comes the question: “Who’s thinking about these things?” I’m a movie guy and this causes me to think about one of the final scenes from Indiana Jones, Raiders of the Lost Ark. Indy is questioning a government official about the Ark and the G-man’s quote was, “We have top men working on it right now.” Indy’s response: “Who?” G-man’s response: “Top Men”.



All kidding aside, my point is that there's a great deal to think about and just about when we think our top people have thought of it all, we find out that this is not at all the case. Creativity and ideas for improvement must be a constant flow from anyone into some sort of portal of consideration.

Back in corporate America, I recall years of "Suggestion Box" thinking. Sometimes the Suggestion Box was thought to be a waste of time. There was even plenty of lighthearted visuals of the suggestion box being located over a garbage can (Suggestions Welcome). I'm sure they were just kidding, right?

At a leading company in the area, we created a "Suggestion Central" system where ALL employee ideas were not only taken seriously but responded to and if appropriate, deployed to improve our operations or customer satisfaction. The results: Industry leading results with customer and employee satisfaction.

No magic - just asking for opinion, accepting ideas, and executing what makes sense. There are examples of this mentality all over the world. Why not in Hampton Roads?

Comparing our region to a company, we are completely decentralized. Our cities and community efforts are all too often disconnected. The result: the left hand not being in sync with the right. We all know what that's like.

List any community organization you want and there's an example of ideas from their constituents. Sometimes these ideas bubble up for the good of the organization but sometimes they don't go the full distance to be considered for the region.

Conceptually, we are talking about ideas for improvements from anyone, anywhere in the region. A regional suggestion box of sorts. An area where creative ideas will be viewed.



Here's the reality. We are all in this together. No one has all the answers. Some of us get so close to a problem that we can't see the solution. It sometimes takes a fresh set of eyes and thoughts to achieve the breakthrough idea. The "AHA moment".

I think we should consider creating a regional on-line system called HamptonRoadsIdeas.com (just a label placeholder for now).

As always, the devil is in the details. How would we position a regional suggestion box? Who would staff it and review the recommendations? With whom would we share the ideas?

Given that there is no single decision-making body for all issues, we have a distributed model of information flow to consider.

Perhaps a single site with categorization of ideas (i.e. transportation, brain drain/gain, entrepreneurship support, economic development, infrastructure, etc.). Under each category header is a free-flowing stream of ideas.

Any citizen could enter and submit an idea. A resource somewhere would simply review for appropriateness and post.

Then, anyone from anywhere can log on to view the comments and perhaps share the AHA moment toward action. City governments, educators, businesses, communities - everyone - could view and just scroll through citizen ideas.

Could this be an opportunity? I don't know. Could this be managed somehow? I don't know. What I do know is that lost ideas are bad for business, bad for our region and bad for us all.

I think the idea has merit. I think we need to consider some sort of regional suggestion box. How do we create a Hampton Roads Idea Bank? Let's get to work on that, shall we?

-END-

8) Organizational Intelligence for Hampton Roads

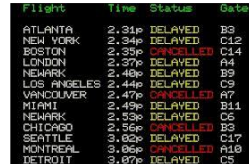
October 2014

Another indicator that entrepreneurship should be a larger part of our regional economy came from the recent State of the Region (2014). At this point, I think we have had adequate evidence that we need to do more in this area.

I have written about knitting the regional quilt (connecting separate pieces of fabric), which I think is still a good metaphor. However, there's a new consideration about the need for Organizational Intelligence (OI) necessary to navigate, coordinate, stimulate, execute, market and (hopefully) succeed.

From Wiki, here's a snippet from their OI [Link](#): Organizational Intelligence (OI) is the capability of an organization to comprehend and conclude knowledge relevant to its business purpose.

- An ability to make sense of complex situations and act effectively.
- An ability to interpret and act upon relevant events and signals in the environment.
- Ability to develop, share and use knowledge relevant to its business purpose.
- Ability to reflect and learn from experience.



Flight	Time	Status	Gate
ATLANTA	2.31p	DELAIED	B9
NEW YORK	2.34p	DELAIED	C12
BOSTON	2.35p	CANCELLED	C14
LONDON	2.37p	DELAIED	A4
NEWARK	2.46p	DELAIED	B9
LOS ANGELES	2.44p	DELAIED	C9
VANCOUVER	2.47p	CANCELLED	A7
MIAMI	2.49p	DELAIED	B11
NEWARK	2.53p	DELAIED	C5
CHICAGO	2.56p	CANCELLED	B5
SEATTLE	3.02p	DELAIED	C17
MONTREAL	3.06p	CANCELLED	A10
DETROIT	3.07p	DELAIED	C5

The departure I suggest is to think of Hampton Roads as the “business of our region” which seeks to succeed. OI, as a system and process, with the right groups and people working together, is perhaps an initiative worth trying.

As an example, the recent fire at the Aurora IL Air Traffic Control (ATC) not only took out all coordination of flights in Chicago but impacted the nation as well. The lack of coordination impacted people economically, as well as their quality of life (at least temporarily). The fire took out the ATC's Organizational Intelligence for the flights in/out of Chicago, which creates ripple effects everywhere. No coordination translated to failure.

Now consider just some of the great things happening in our region:

- We have entrepreneurship getting far more mindshare with incubators on the south side and peninsula.
- We have study groups on Leadership, Workforce Development, Entrepreneurism, and Industry (Tech) Clusters.
- Colleges are engaged (Old Dominion, CNU, Regent, more).
- We have a renewed emphasis on investment dollars being placed in the right young business opportunities.
- We have groups like the Entrepreneurs Organization Southeast who, via their strategic alliance with Future of Hampton Roads, have been very active in mentoring young businesses.
- We have high technology (STEM) education in our high schools, as well as technology group tech and entrepreneurship camps including Shark Tank events.
- We have TEDx events back in Hampton Roads after being gone for several years. Chesapeake in 2013, Norfolk in 2014 and more coming (perhaps).

All good news, right? Yes, but we still have several risks and challenges ahead to make it all stick. The question I ask is: [“Do we have the regional Organizational Intelligence to make progress as effective as possible on a regional basis?”](#)

In business, some companies are highly centralized or highly decentralized (and, in fact, fluctuate due to business conditions). There is no right or wrong answer. My experience has taught me that it depends on what you’re trying to accomplish. It is broader reach? Is in cost control? Is it geographic/cultural alignment? Is its available workforce? All these factors (and more) come into play.

Back to our region. We are highly decentralized (with a few noteworthy examples), based on our history and evolution. We work hard to create common threads on transportation, sanitation, etc. However, we are a whole bunch of cities (and counties) who are often doing their own thing. That’s OK to a degree as it creates a competitive market. However, when we think of regional progress, it’s like nudging corners of a heavy couch across a room.

There are certainly opportunities to move faster and in unison so that we capitalize on our opportunities. Technology,

entrepreneurism, and land use to name only a few and some that were listed earlier in this article.

Another question I would pose is: “[How can we optimize our region’s chances of succeeding with all these new initiatives?](#)”

Perhaps the answer is to create some Organizational Intelligence for our region. Think of it as an air traffic control mechanism for entrepreneurship and more in our region.

If we had a collective Organizational Intelligence (awareness, evaluation, collaboration, recommendations, marketing and more) we could perhaps be a little less decentralized intellectually. Note that I am not talking about ownership of separate efforts. We respect the independence and initiative of several efforts. However, we are talking about “knitting the quilt” and creating a layer of Regional Organizational Intelligence. I can think of several advantages:

1. We could market ourselves in a more unified manner, demonstrating ALL our regional advantages and opportunities to the outside world.
2. We might help to defeat Brain Drain and create Brain Gain.
3. We would have a better regional collective of opportunities to build what we have and even attract more entrepreneurial business to our area.
4. We would create the control tower for our Entrepreneurial Ecosystem which We have been advocating.
5. We would simply look more attractive and organized.

I may overly simplify things, but I believe we need processes and systems to create the highest level of regional effectiveness in these areas. We need to create our regional ATC of innovation, creativity, and business development. [Hampton Roads Organizational Intelligence](#).

Considerations

- 1) Create the regional ATC equivalent for Entrepreneurial Business (Organizational Intelligence).
- 2) Leverage resources that we have if possible.

- 3) DON'T create any new organizations if we can avoid it. That's been part of the region's challenge, too many overlapping groups/efforts.
- 4) Link the logical groups we have and develop new regional solutions as needed.
- 5) Assemble a coordination entity from our existing solutions.
- 6) Develop an organized approach with measurements, success criteria and gap analysis.

Actionable Possibilities

Look at what we already have:

- The new Regional Council (Future of Hampton Roads, CIVIC, Chambers, HREDA, HRMFFA).
- Strategy groups in several cities (VB Vision, Chesapeake Alliance, Greater Norfolk Corp, Portsmouth Partnership, Greater Peninsula Now to name a few).
- Urban Land Institute for Transit Oriented Development and Live/Work/Play Development to attract and keep younger generations.
- Technology Council as a traditional technology entity who could be re-shaped and re-purposed for general entrepreneurship support.
- Our colleges on both the south side and peninsula.

Could we create a coalition of these strategic thinkers, linking efforts to create coordination and deployment of various ideas?

Could we provide input and thoughts to our various municipalities for consideration?

Could we create that layer of Organization Intelligence for the business of Hampton Roads?

We need thinkers but we also need **DO-ERS**. There must be responsibility, execution, and accountability or efforts will potentially fail. Realize that many of the new activities listed earlier have been initiated by well-meaning, smart people who have day jobs. These great people have participated and want to stay involved but may not have the full-time cycles to dedicate to some of the larger regional coordination efforts.

Here's an example from Pittsburgh: [Pittsburgh High Tech Ecosystem](#)

Here's an example from Tennessee: [Startup Tennessee](#)

I could fill pages with other examples of Organizational Intelligence from around the country.

As always, we must place efforts into the details of coordinating and managing any regional effort in Hampton Roads. It's not about ownership as we are a region of multiple owners. It is a matter of coordination and effective execution with those truly interested in collaboration for a greater good.

I believe we have all the puzzle pieces. Let's assemble our vision and advance effectively into the future. Who's tired of nudging a couch?

-END-