



SEVEN SECRETS OF BUSINESS WISDOM

**Finding True Wealth:
More Money, Time & Meaning
In Entrepreneurship**

A stylized illustration of a landscape with rolling hills and a large mountain peak in the background, rendered in shades of green and black.

SHERRYL DEVER

Seven Secrets Of Business Wisdom

**Surprising ways to gain true wealth:
more money, time and meaning in your business**

Sherryl L. Dever

THE SEVEN SECRETS OF BUSINESS WISDOM – Surprising ways to gain true wealth: more time, money and meaning in your business. Copyright © 2014 by Sherryl L. Dever. All rights reserved. Printed in the United States. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without written permission from the authors, except for the inclusion of brief quotations articles and reviews. For information address Three Wings Media 5464 Skylane Boulevard, Suite A. Santa Rosa, CA 95403.

For information or to order other Three Wings Media products contact:

Three Wings Media
5464 Skylane Blvd., Suite A
Santa Rosa, CA
www.threewingsmedia.com
800-851-5973

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-publication Data pending.
Dever, Sherryl L.

ISBN: 978-0-9904352-0-4

Three Wings Media rev. date: 04.09.2014

Through the story of Mark,

a hard-working business owner, *7 Secrets of Business Wisdom* offers a timeless tale describing the all too common entrepreneurial experience—and how to grow beyond it.

Although Mark gives it his all every day, he is falling behind in his business and personal life.

Outrageous success seems to be just around the corner, yet still eludes him. Mark is about to give up when a powerful journey takes him on a surprising path that unlocks greater personal satisfaction and higher profits for him in his business.

Dedication

To Marva Joyce Dever, who taught me
the real meaning of perseverance.

And to the love of my life, Bruce.

CONTENTS

Where Did Seven Secrets Come From? ..i	
Remember Who We Are	iv
The Journey	1
The Teacher	29
The Secrets	39
Secret # 1 Understanding	45
Secret # 2 Heart	59
Secret # 3 Mind	64
Secret # 4 Emotion	71
Secret # 5 Choice	86
Secret # 6 Destination	95
Secret # 7 Competence	100
The Epilogue	119
Back Stuff	
Secrets Condensed	122
The Author	131
Our Gratitude	133

So Where Did Seven Secrets Come From?

In the early '80s I began my training as a small business advisor. I was extremely fortunate. I was young, just out of college, wide-eyed, and full of hope for the future. I had always known I was destined for great things because my Mom told me so. And of course, I believed her.

Years later, in the course of training small business consultants, I realized that it took more than hope and good intentions. I began to see that dispensing advice, even when people pay for it, was no solution in itself. Sure, clients seemed appreciative, and they achieved genuine improvement and success during our time together. But when I followed up later, I found many of my clients, in many instances, hadn't maintained the practices we so successfully put in place while working together.

Eventually, at The Business Resource we developed a different approach. We realized that we had to have a philosophy in our daily practice to be effective. *7 Secrets of Business Wisdom* springs from the work we—my staff, colleagues and clients—did together. I couldn't have accomplished half of what I share in this book without them.

I've always been a seeker; I've looked for and listened to the universal signs and symbols that guide us. I decided to start sharing ways our clients could better connect with this wisdom. At the same time I carefully listened to them to learn what they needed to be successful. That's how we eventually developed our unique way of serving our clients: finding out what people want and showing them how to get it.

This story is an amalgam of that collaboration, a compilation of our work with small business owners and entrepreneurs in more than 15,000 consulting, management and planning sessions. We learned from our clients what was important to them and how we needed to shape our “being of service” to them. Although the story may be fiction, the lessons clients taught us are true and instructive—and extremely valuable.

Through our work as management professionals, and in my personal pursuit of greater business wisdom, this secret journey has been revealed as a gift. That gift has demonstrated to us that there is a shared thought process that can yield outrageous success, and it's close at hand every day.

We've discovered that this success stems from a daily set of actions, what I now call the 7 Secrets. As the saying goes, it's a journey, not only a destination.

The 7 Secrets are presented as universal business truths, many of which are already a part of your awareness and good sense. Others will be new ideas that you can start practicing the same day you read them. That's how accessible this information is—once you become aware of it. These principles will affirm business truths you already know or have sensed. They will serve to further enhance and unlock your greater potential as an entrepreneur by emphasizing and prioritizing certain organizing principles.

The concepts in the 7 Secrets of Business Wisdom are simple, yet they can seem elusive. These 7 Secrets are patterns we are all capable of following, and they can bring us to a new, simpler level of business awareness. Through the 7 Secrets you can discover ways of doing business that are more fun and rewarding. For example, I have learned that what we focus on most is what we receive. So if you focus on hard work, oh, you'll get hard work. But if you focus on achieving a balance between profits and personal satisfaction, you can achieve that.

My hope is that this book brings you great success as you explore this universal wisdom and discover renewed energy and purpose in your work.

Remember Who You Are

Since 2008, everything has changed, both locally and worldwide: the economy, technology and government regulations, as well as the workforce and marketplaces. No small business is immune to these universal changes.

If you were in business before 2008 or began your business after that, it is important to remember, the world is always changing.

Our future may seem uncertain because we're in uncharted territory and face so many new experiences. Adapting to anything new can often feel like leaping off a cliff. But we must take that leap and say goodbye to outmoded ways that no longer work. Today's marketplace requires fresh thinking and a sharper business perspective.

Over the course of 30 years, I've interviewed thousands of business owners. I've listened carefully to their hopes and dreams and their fears and concerns. One overriding principle runs through each story: The faster we business owners can adapt to the changed needs of the marketplace, the better. This makes us more competitive. And by staying competitive, we'll be able to meet our

personal and business goals so we achieve positive financial results. The 7 Secrets are all about adapting your business strategy to excel in the new marketplace.

When my clients and colleagues ask me, “Will it ever be like it used to be?” I assure them that their customers haven’t gone away. They’re still in the marketplace, they’re just buying less and expecting more. Frugality is the new status symbol. I explain that self-reliance is the cornerstone of the new economy. By that I mean, nobody else will do it for us. It’s up to us to take charge. The 7 Secrets can help make this important transition. You can use each of them to better prepare yourself to meet and exceed your customers’ and clients’ expectations so they choose you and continue to work with you.

Sure, conditions have changed, but gravity hasn’t been suspended. We get what we create, either by design or default. When you started your own business, you faced a test of courage (mixed with a little naivety). As you built your business, you created systems that made your business grow. But now that you’re more experienced, you can’t let your established routines and procedures stop you from making necessary business changes. Your seasoned leadership and your entrepreneurial spirit are both essential to shape what’s to come.

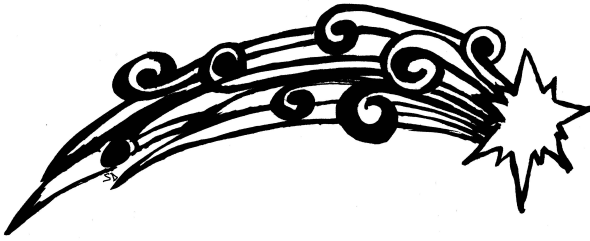
Along the way, remember who you are. Small business is the economic engine to the world. You are part of an amazing reality. You help change the world every day. By making sure the right products and services show up for everyone who needs them, you make a difference.

You pledge your fortune and sacred honor, putting your own money and ideas at risk to fulfill your dreams and serve others.

Now is the time to gather your thoughts and create your next generation of successes by telling your authentic story through the way you do business.

Over the next decade, our reaction to change will help us define what matters most to our families, our communities and our businesses.

You can use the Seven Secrets to tackle this change.



In a time when so much is available to us —
when all the information we need is readily accessible
to help us run our businesses more efficiently
and more profitably, more easily and
more inexpensively than ever:

Why do we still struggle?

We can blame the economy

Or

some other seemingly uncontrollable force

Or

We can take charge of ourselves
and our businesses in a new way.

This is the tale of a guy
who learned...

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step.

~ Lao-tzu



The Journey

The day started like every other day. I rounded the corner heading north on Dutton Avenue in my shiny red sports car. The street turned into the business park where my office was located. The clean tree-lined streets reminded me of where I'd come from, not by similarity but by contrast.

Compared to other parts of the world, my town seems set apart: a beautiful little town north of San Francisco in the wine country. Good schools, low crime, wonderful weather, quiet neighborhoods and a buzzing downtown. But right now my business experiences remind me more of where I grew up than this charming town.

I grew up outside San Francisco, near Berkeley, California, in the Sixties and Seventies. Back there I always felt a heightened awareness of my surroundings. The San Francisco Bay area, though a suburb of San Francisco, was the kind of place where people did what they needed to do to survive. In the Sixties, our neighborhood was idyllic. In the Seventies, it shifted toward rough.

Like when my mom had a gun pointed at her while she worked for a friend of my dad's, running his corner grocery/liquor store. Mom was smart and handed over everything she could get her hands on.

But this experience taught me a big lesson: Anything life dishes out I can handle. I carry that sensibility with me today. I can survive anything. If my own mother could stare down the barrel of a gun and come out alive, none the worse for wear, I can stare down my own destiny and take charge of it. I have that instinct to gut it out.

I left the city almost 30 years ago. I've had some good years, but today in my business, I feel as though I'm back in the old neighborhood—doing what I need to survive. And I'm stuck there.

The closer I drive toward the office, my stress level soars. Sure, I just finished an extraordinary week with increased sales—nothing like this time last year when demand for my product and services hit an all-time low and the company and I went deeply into debt. I've made some headway, but the debt is still all-consuming. Dollars that should go to building the company are going toward paying old bills. I'm falling prey to the oldest problem in business, robbing Peter to pay Paul, and Peter is just about broke.

The stress is getting to me. I can't even think about my business without my heart racing. It's hard to focus on anything but what's wrong. I can't remember when my day went as planned, when one fire didn't spread into another, and another. When I stop to catch my breath, I recall how it didn't always feel this way. It was simpler before, when we first started. What happened? How did I get here?

After finishing college, I went to work for a small manufacturer in Silicon Valley. I advanced quickly, earned good pay and enjoyed my work. I worked day and night, giving my all to the company. I shared a common vision and a passion for my work with my fellow employees. We were a small team working for a chance to move up the management chain and land those all-important stock options. The future looked bright.

Then in a flash it was over. My supervisor delivered the bad news: The company was on a downswing. Since I was one of the last hired, I would be one of the first to go.

I was stunned. I put every ounce of my time and energy, heart and soul into a company that had promised to be there for me—and now wasn't. I did the only thing that made sense: I mustered the courage to negotiate a good exit package and maintained my dignity. I took a hike.

Literally. I backpacked for a few days in the Tahoe National Forest at a spot I had known since childhood, just southwest of Lake Tahoe. For company, I called my longtime friend and camping buddy Rick, an attorney who specialized in business development and taking companies public. Then I packed all the necessities, including a flask of single malt Scotch and a tape recorder, just in case we came up with the next big idea.

I'll never forget that Friday when I met Rick in Vacaville to make the rest of the trek together. We took my Jeep up the highway and then down a two-lane road to the Tahoe Basin.

What a time we had, talking and laughing and reminiscing about the old days. We decided to hike for three or four hours, make camp, build a campfire and settle in for the night.

As we hiked, we talked about my next move in my career.

"Why don't you start your own company?" Rick asked. "You have the necessary skills. I could help you round up the resources."

“Now?” I asked, sounding as incredulous as I felt. Although I always believed I would start my own business, I hadn’t considered it happening so soon. Not now. Not yet. Not after what had just happened.

I took a sip of Scotch and sat quietly thinking about Rick’s question. I *was* interested in exploring the idea, and I felt my enthusiasm and excitement build. We began to talk and brainstorm, and the idea became more viable. I had previously developed concepts for products, and I had enough money plus a key customer to get me going.

This could really work, I thought to myself. We could make a mint! My disappointment with being laid-off disappeared, replaced by the dream of my beckoning new business.

That night in the mountains we laughed about how ludicrous it is to bank on someone else's company to build our futures. I could clearly see that the only way I could ever realize the wealth and success I was destined for was to start my own business.

Rick and I talked and plotted that night. The next day we recorded on a handheld recorder what we needed to get the company started. We identified my top three products and pinpointed key prospective customers. Rick even knew where I could hook up with inexpensive office and warehouse space.

As for where I'd set up my business, Silicon Valley had become too congested and expensive; the North Bay was more suitable. What I didn't know about business, Rick assured me I could pick up as I went along. He knows how driven I am. And he knew I had a keen ability to understand and apply knowledge—something that had helped me through school. I was sure I had the right stuff to own my own company.

I recall driving back Sunday night feeling high as a kite. No liquor since Saturday, so it was a natural high. I couldn't wait to make all the arrangements. I knew I had all the answers; I was ready to meet my new challenge and fulfill my destiny as an entrepreneur.

By Monday morning, I set off with my life savings and a book of notes and sketches on the adventure a lifetime. Everything lay at my feet: opportunity, the possibility of huge success, wealth and happiness. Only it didn't work out that way.

* * * *

Early on, everything began so quickly and fell right into place. Don't get me wrong; I spent lots of long days and nights with so much—almost too much—to do, but I pushed through. It was all so exciting, intoxicating. When anything negative crossed my path, I simply focused on the sheer possibilities of my new business. We set up shop in a small warehouse with a tiny office, just enough space for me and a few employees.

Time flew.

Five years later, and we're still in business. We're busy promoting, negotiating deals, designing new products and working hard on our customer service. Sure, there are glitches here and there, but we're clearer about our goals.

We do need more customers, though, to increase sales. My old client didn't come through with enough orders to count on his company as a main source of business. The business is tougher than I thought it would be, but I still believe we can make this happen. Sure we can.

I also need additional funds. I knew I was under-funded, so I went to see my banker to find out how he could help with the company's growing pains. If I just had a little more capital to spend, I knew that would push the business right over the top.

My next business surprise: Banks lend money only when you don't need it. My credit had already slipped, and we had some overdue bills. Our ratios and product didn't really fit for venture capital. Besides, I'm not willing to give up controlling interest in my business to a venture capitalist.

Short of working capital, I'm heading down the slippery slope of holding checks and shorting invoices. Vendors' payments are behind; many are now demanding COD. I've scaled back and laid off personnel to conserve cash, breaking my first promise to myself that I'd never do that. The harder I work, the more the business needs me to keep it going.

I'm now having to fill the gaps in sales, production and bookkeeping myself, taking me away from more important functions. And taxes are overdue. Some paydays I have to ask employees to hold their paychecks for a couple of days. I've broken so many promises to pay vendors I can't count them. I've been able to replace a few vendors, but now I can't pay the new vendors. Customers are paying slowly, and I'm working on collections as well as everything else.

My life savings, including my house, are on the line. With no family or friends to borrow from, I'm feeling all used up.

I believe I'm doing everything I can to make this work, so why is it getting harder and harder? I feel as though I'm watching a movie of another person's life. Who is this character? Not me; it couldn't be me. With all my smarts, I'm too bright for this. Why am I in this position? I've worked so hard, I deserve to be beyond this hardscrabble life.

Just thinking about all these problems has worked me into such a frenzy that I can hardly breathe. I open the car's window to get some air as I pull up next to the front entrance to my office.

I'm early as usual, two hours ahead of my team. Team? Who am I kidding? Everything falls on my shoulders. I unlock the doors, continue down the hallway to my office, pick up the ten messages left overnight. Eight from disgruntled creditors; one for Sue, my administrative assistant; and a hang-up.

This is the day I promised Sue I'd have my paperwork cleaned up. But by the time Sue comes in, I've found only the top of my desk and cleared a spot.

We review the daily schedule and discover sales and orders are still low. Sue turns as she's about leave and tells me, "I know this probably isn't a good time, Mark, but I need you to know I'll have to give notice if things don't pick up. I'm scared. I have a mortgage to meet. I want to be here for you, but I need to make sure I can pay my bills."

"Sure, Sue, I understand," I say. "But really, things are looking up." As she leaves my office, I add, "And thanks for your honesty."

Sue looks over her shoulder, the sadness in her eyes revealing everything she was too polite to say. She doesn't believe me, and I don't either. I can't think what I can do to increase sales. And why bother? I won't be able to finance them anyway. I'm letting everyone down, including myself.

I'm completely wrung out, and it's only mid-morning. I can't seem to concentrate. I stare out the window. The phone rings. Sue tells me that one of our lease companies is calling about a returned check.

“Just tell him I'm in conference, and I'll be out until Monday,” I tell her. Now I'm getting Sue to cover for me.

My mind is clouded by all the responsibilities. I feel a sense of overwhelming grief for the loss of opportunity and incredible possibilities. I've been sitting here doing nothing for an hour and didn't even know it. I've got to get my head clear; I need to get out of the office.

I'll take a trip, give myself some time to think, or not, just as I did years ago with Rick. I decide to go to the mountains, though secretly I think to myself that I may just keep on driving and never look back. Maybe I'll end up in Wyoming and become a bartender at the Cowboy Bar in Jackson Hole.

“Hey, Sue,” I shout into the next office. “I won't be taking any more calls for the day. I think I'll just go home.” Stretching the truth is coming easier and easier.

On the drive home, I think about how I could just crawl into my bed and sleep for days. Once home, I slide the key in the lock, unlock the front door, and head straight to my bedroom. I sit on the corner of my bed and then lean back on my clean white comforter and plop my head back on my pillow. My head still spinning, I close my eyes.

I can't stop thinking about running away. I picture where my backpack is in the closet and which things to grab out of the garage. I know I'd better get going or I'm liable to strip down, jump in the sack, and pull the covers over my head—maybe just hide out here for the next week.

I doze off, but the weight of my problems jolt me awake. I rub my head and lie there for a few minutes. I feel as though I'm drowning—I've got to get out of here to save my life. I jump up, head to the dresser drawer and pull all the right things to pack for a weekend in the mountains.

I pad down the hall to the inside garage door. My sleeping bag and lightweight aluminum backpack are tucked on the high shelf above the laundry area—tightly wrapped in plastic. I smirk at my efficiency—all ready for a spur of the moment trip that I haven't taken since I started my business. My business had consumed me. Well, I'm ready now.

I pull my pack off the shelf, attach my sleeping bag, stuff my essentials inside. I decide to leave my sports car home—my old Jeep, under a cover in the garage, is still in terrific shape. I pull off the cover and toss my gear in the back. I lock the house and start my Jeep. I'm on the road again.

The Jeep knows the route to Tahoe. Good thing because I'm on auto pilot: 150 miles later I can't remember any of the scenery or even my thoughts. Before I realize it, I'm near the very spot Rick and I first conceived the idea for my business. Given the way my business is going, right now I should hate this place; instead I feel so at peace here. These woods are a familiar spot for me, having come here on summer vacations since I was a kid. Tall pines, old growth redwoods, scrub oaks and California bay fill every hillside as far as the eye can see. The sun shines through the canopy of the forest, painting a speckled pattern on everything in sight. Filtered sunlight warms the mossy ground near the path I'm on. The air is sweet.

I've left thoughts of my business behind. No schedule to follow, no cell phone, telephone calls, or executive decisions. My only thoughts are when to walk, when to rest, when to drink water.

I walk for hours, following the gently sloping trail toward a familiar hillside and an open meadow covered in wildflowers. I stop for a rest, something I rarely do back in town.

“God I miss this place,” I say aloud, sighing as the weight of my life shifts just a little.

It's always been a treasure for me. Why did I get so wrapped around the axle with this entrepreneur stuff? Laughing to myself, I think how much “the forest for the trees” syndrome fits me to a tee.

Standing on a knoll that overlooks the Tahoe Basin, I can see the entire lake. No human activity is visible. I feel wonderfully secluded. Alone. The profound beauty of this magnificent countryside reminds me that I am not the center of the universe, nor am I in control. I surrender to the peace and quiet.

I move across the meadow and veer off the beaten path. I feel transformed, not caring what is happening back in town. I'll sleep under the stars tonight; I haven't done that since my trip with Rick.

As I warm my dinner over the small bright campfire, I hear a hoot owl in the distance. I eat my favorite beef stew, concentrating on making slower moves, more thoughtful and intentional. A welcome change from my life back at the company.

I crawl into my sleeping bag and lie on my back, looking up at the stars, bright and ablaze. With no city lights to interfere, I can see the halo of the Milky Way. I start thinking how the city blinds us from the important things in life, just as it dulls the brilliance of the stars.

I'm awakened by the sentry call of a crow, my senses keener in the mountains. Teeming with echoes of jays, finches and rushing water from the nearby creek, my meadow has delivered some of what I was searching for. I feel the possibility for change, though I don't know yet what that is.

After a dip in the creek, I start along the trail and reach a fork. I take the path to the right, winding under the moss-covered footbridge to the sandy beach. Just the spot for less clothing and more solitude.

As I survey the vast landscape in this stunning basin, I realize I had to come back to a place, physically and mentally.

It all began here years ago.

I can't help wondering if I will make the decision to end my business here too.



The Teacher

As I leave the beach and continue my descent, I see another hiker approaching. A woman. Out here alone? Must be familiar with the area, I think to myself. She has her eye on the horizon, scanning the distance. I follow her gaze and see other hikers off in the distance. Maybe she's with those day trippers.

She spots me and heads in my direction. A few yards away, she asks, "Do you mind if I share the rest stop?"

I wave her ahead. She seems friendly, smiling at me as she sits on a large rock. Her flowing raven hair stops just above her orange t-shirt. She sets down her pack, which looks much like mine. Barely out of breath, she says,

"Good morning! Shade feels great, thanks for sharing."

"Sure thing, happy to share."

"My name is LeAnne."

"Mark," I offer, nodding and smiling back.

LeAnne seems familiar, but I'm certain I don't know her. Just the kind of person you click with right away. As we relax with our backs against a big rock, our gear strewn around us, our conversation continues with the usual warm-up banter: Where are you from? What do you do? She is a business owner from the East Bay, out for a day hike for rejuvenation. This is her favorite place, she tells me; she's been coming here for years. After almost an hour sharing stories about experiences of this area and our businesses, I feel so relaxed that I confess to LeAnne that I'm seriously considering shutting down my company.

“I've been there. Tough decision,” she adds.

“Really? You too?”

“It was the worst and eventually best time of my life,” she says. “I was working my butt off; the more I invested, the more my business took. I was obsessed. I worked 10- to 18-hour days for weeks on end. The harder I worked, the less return I received. It almost killed me. I was so stressed, yet I thought that was what it took to be successful. Problem was, my body began to rebel. Pneumonia, bronchitis, soon stomach disorders. I tried everything I could find—from alternative and preventive measures to traditional medicine—but eventually I had to have corrective surgery on my digestive system. That’s when it hit me: I was working my guts out, and it wasn’t a metaphor!”

I couldn't believe my ears; I felt as though I were listening to myself. I couldn't wait to hear how she solved her problems.

“Please continue,” I said.

“My doctor told me stress was a major contributor to my illness, and with my family history, I had to eliminate the stress. I told her I couldn't, that I was pursuing my life's dream. ‘It's your life,’ the doctor added, ‘but it may be a short dream if you don't pay attention.’

“While I was in the hospital, sales declined and the business was slipping. I thought my company was done. Then it hit me. What was I thinking? I was driving myself into the ground, yet I was worried only about the company. I woke up, finally.

“It's taken me a while to recover my health, but along the way I discovered something: I was trying to build my business without the clearest frames of reference.

“I sent up a signal for help, asked everyone if they knew anyone who could help. A business associate recommended some people he had worked with. I contacted them, liked what I saw, hired them and started on the path to business recovery.”

I think of my own experience. My head hurts every day. I now realize my body knows, even if my mind is in denial. Clearly I am in over my head—no wonder I felt as though I were drowning. I want to know those people too, the ones who helped LeAnne. But maybe my business is too far gone.

“How did they help you?” I ask, trying to keep desperation out of my voice.

“They helped me identify my problem areas, develop a plan, implement changes, evaluate opportunities with fresh eyes. And they became a valuable part of my management team. Along the way I gained clear, pure insight. It changed me forever.”

I continue to listen as LeAnne recounts more details. I can't help thinking that we are living parallel lives.

“The day I realized,” she continues, “that my job needed to be guided—not forced—was the day I was truly transformed.”

“What led you to that conclusion?” I ask, hoping I can learn that lesson in my own business life.

She smiles, reaches into her back pocket, pulls out a small card and hands it to me. On the front are symbols and on the reverse side some text.

“This is my reminder,” she says. “Every time I feel out of focus or as though I'm swimming in deep water, I pull out this card, look at these universal symbols and remind myself of what they represent. All I need to do is to ask myself a few questions, then read the signs to get back on track.”

My spirits sink as my skepticism soars. I think to myself, is this one of those self-help hype things? LeAnne senses my concern. She smiles knowingly, takes the card back from me.

“Stop me if you don't like what I have to say; you won't hurt my feelings,” she adds.

I nod to assure her I wanted to hear more, even if it is one of those airy-fairy, self-help things. What do I have to lose? I feel so alone in my business problems: out of money, out of time and stretched beyond my limit. I'm open to anything that can help me move beyond this difficult phase.

LeAnne smiles and nods back. She then picks up a stick and begins to scratch marks in the sandy soil that will change my life.



The Secrets

LeAnne draws a single vertical line in the sand. She pauses and looks me in the eye.

“First, let me warn you,” she says. “What I am about to tell you is much easier to talk about than it is to do. When I first learned of the concept of leveraging my life-lessons to succeed in business, I was skeptical. I didn’t want to do this work.”

“OK, forewarned,” I say. “Please go on.”

“Without a qualified support system, your current business conditions are unlikely to change. Learning from our past experiences or mistakes is not a platitude. It takes real intention, and it doesn’t happen by accident. And leveraging our life-lessons doesn’t happen because we say we want to, either. Although intention is important, it’s not enough. Learning to leverage our life-lessons is a systematic method of adopting new habits that serve our business goals better next time. It’s a combination of one, constantly seeking the better way, and two, incorporating the feedback of others for growth and change within ourselves. So, Mark, are you are ready for this?”

“Oh, I’m ready all right,” I say with so much zeal I feel my face flush.

“Understanding is the gateway of the 7 Secrets. It opens the door to a deeper, broader perspective that can help us reframe our thoughts and tap into our inner wisdom. This choice to ‘reframe’ is the key to the secret journey.

“The 7 Secrets are universal frames of reference and apply to all of us; they are a part of our nature as human beings. Put another way, the 7 Secrets are the way we think *before* we think. When actively adopted as personal operating principles, they become our path toward greater success and business satisfaction.”

I am nodding like a bobble-head doll as I begin connecting with everything LeAnne is saying. I feel as though I’ve had access to this knowledge all my life—though I may fail at putting much of it into practice.

I stand and walk around the rocky plateau for a few minutes. LeAnne seems to understand that I need time to process—and prepare—before we go any further. I look at the amazing horizon ahead of me, ragged with ancient redwoods and massive upheavals. I actually chuckle at that word—upheaval—and know I am ready to deal with mine. When I sit down, LeAnne takes that as her cue to continue.

LeAnne draws a second line in the sandy soil. As she brushes her hair from her eyes, I can see her excitement.

“This image represents the idea that our business is a journey of refining our **understanding**—over time. We need to understand that our greatest strength is also our worthy opponent. I know this sounds counterintuitive, but think about it. We’re the person at the top—isolated and working on our own, most of the time without asking for much input. Even if we have a great staff, they don’t give us—the boss—honest feedback because their jobs are at stake. So we plow ahead, fueled by our passion. But this works against us if we don’t listen to honest input, ignoring or overriding others’ opinions. Sometimes even reading between the lines.



Secret 1 ~ Understanding

*We are our greatest strength
and limitation.*

“Transforming ourselves transforms our business.”

“The vertical axis represents money in increments that fit our business growth: thousands, tens of thousands, millions, whatever. The horizontal axis represents time, any amount of time, months, years, decades—whatever best describes our length of time in business. And the center line—or the wall—is the point of no return.

When we begin our businesses, we start out young and small at the lower left corner of these axes. As we march through time, our business grows, and the money running through our business increases in an ever-inclining upward line-*if*, that is, we’re doing it right.”

LeAnne pauses, and I'm thankful for a moment to catch up. Her voice grows quiet and focused as she continues.

“Our businesses, like our lives, have passages and cycles. We need to gain greater knowledge of these passages to identify our business-growth stages so we can plan for them and minimize shock and surprise. To the left of the wall is survival, to the right is thriving. As our business grows, time passes and money grows until we hit a plateau or barrier. **This is when we need to become aware of our strengths as limitations.**

When we're at the edge of that wall, we either gather more information so we can move ahead or delay making the tough choices or necessary decisions. Most people bump against the wall and continue to apply the same skills and understanding. As founders, we have limited skills because no one can do everything well. But instead of addressing this, we work harder and naively expect a different result.

This is a crucial error. We mistakenly think that what we know how to do, or what is familiar to us, is what we need to achieve success. We apply what we know to the problem because we cannot know what we do not know. Because our greatest strength is our willingness to do whatever it takes, we continue to work harder and harder with less to show for it. Eventually, we run out of time or money or strength. Often at this point we may feel like firing someone, quitting or selling out or even retiring from the business.”

I don't know whether to laugh or cry. LeAnne's got my number. This is my M.O., and it's crushing me. She senses my raw emotions and smiles in a knowing way.

“Once we surrender to the idea that we are our business' greatest limitation, that we, the founder, have become our own worthy opponent in our own business, we open the door to learning what needs to happen next—instead of simply plowing ahead the old way. Once we've practically driven ourselves crazy or sick or near bankruptcy, we are finally ready to learn what the rite of passage of true understanding represents. We are ready to pursue a new way.

“Only when we are willing to surrender to the idea that there might be someone or something that could do our job better, **only when we ask for help are we rewarded.** And what is our reward? The right to move past the barriers so our business can thrive.

“Put another way: no surrender, no progress. It’s as plain as that. But remember, we’re exhausted at this point; we’re willing to give it all up and release our attachment. We’re finally ready to allow the business to take on a life of its own and move beyond us. Maybe for the first time, we, as the founder, have seen that we are in our own way.”

LeAnne looks me square in the eyes and adds, “The simple truth is that **we are the source of our business’ strength and its *only* limitation.** That’s when we understand that running a business is about humility and learning our lessons. That’s when we earn the right to move to the next level.

Remember to remember. Business is school, and if we are able to become successful,, we need to listen and watch with learning in mind every time, for as long as we’re in business. To live full business loves, we need to forgive ourselves when we forget, and to be grateful to others who remind us that we’ve forgotten. No matter how hard the lesson or how uncomfortable the issue.

Remember most of all that you do not have to know everything—that in fact you cannot know what you do not know. It’s time to come to terms with that fact. You must embrace the ‘not knowing’ as a way of life and craft a philosophy that allows room for others’ contributions.”

“Use your limitations to your advantage.

Know your strengths. Know your limitations. Don't put your business in the position of relying on your weaknesses to succeed. Assess your skills and get help right away for tasks that aren't your forte. Too often small business owners think they have strengths that they don't have. If you continue to plug holes in your business with a less-qualified staff member, your business will suffer. Especially if that less qualified person is you!

And what you do well can be one of your biggest constraints. Just because you're a great bookkeeper, for example, doesn't mean you should be doing that for your business. Get out of that loop as soon as possible.

“The key to learning our lessons is locked within our own understanding of the fact that our strengths work for us and against us, and each person has a different set of lessons to learn. As business owners, we need to become more aware every day, on purpose. That way we can comprehend the effect our lesson-learning has on the growth and success of our business. We have a responsibility to minimize the negative impact of lessons as they are being learned. At the same time, we need to maximize the learning for the success of the business and all involved.”

LeAnne looks over at me and asks, “What do you think? Too much, huh? Want me to stop?”

“Uh, no,” I answer. “You have my full attention.”

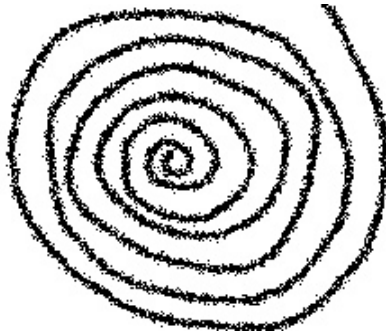
I didn't admit that I felt like a deer in the headlights. And yet I could see myself so clearly in her examples. I always thought it was all up to me to make everything work smoothly. I was sure that if I worked harder everything would fall into place. I was stunned and a little embarrassed too. Did everyone else know this, and I somehow was left out of the secret? Why hadn't I noticed this myself? I'd always considered myself a pretty sharp guy, but I'd never thought about my business experience in this way before.

"If I'd only known this before," I say.

“The teacher appears when the student is ready,” LeAnne says, her voice firm and serious. “Each of us discovers these secrets in a different way, at a different time—when we’ve earned the right to see it. In fact, it is not a character flaw that you didn’t see it before. This revelation reveals itself because the time is right and you chose to see it now.”

LeAnne moves over to a fresh spot and draws concentric circles in the dirt.

“This is the second secret of business wisdom: **Heart**,” she says. “Your business is a reflection of you. You are at the center, and your business is an expression of what is in your heart. Whether you want to show it or not, it shows. Your business reflects your openness or closed-ness to new ways of overcoming old obstacles. It serves as a mirror for you—providing wisdom for you to listen to and learn from. Your business magnifies everything you think, say and do.”



Secret 2 ~ Heart

Our business is a mirror.

“Listen and learn to look within
to manage with an open heart.”

“Wait a minute,” I interrupt. “What do you mean a reflection of me? I have employees that contribute to the business. In fact, they outnumber me ten to one. Isn't the business more of a reflection on them than me?”

“The business is a reflection *of* them, not *on* them. They reflect *your* clarity and lack of clarity. They reflect those areas where you are open and where you are closed.

“The circles represent you in the center, then your family, company, employees, suppliers, customers, potential customers and finally the rest of the world. Your thoughts touch everyone and everything you come in contact with. Choose your thoughts and words carefully. Stay clear and open. Ask questions. Understand that family, employees, suppliers, customers and the world have the answers.

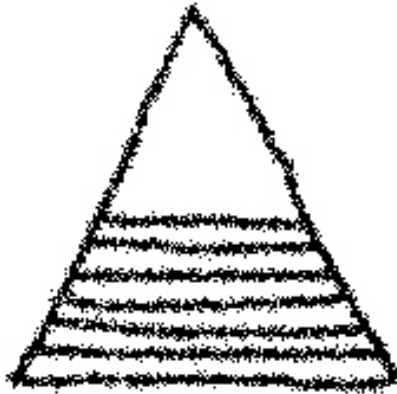
“First look within. When faced with tough business situations or circumstances, instead of waiting for others to solve it, blaming someone else, making an excuse or delivering an explanation—look within yourself.

“In order to be a better leader, you need to ask the right questions, not have all the answers.

Choosing to lead ourselves, by remaining open to the input of others, allows us to earn our passage from survival to thriving in business.”

“The third secret, **Mind**, is our foundation for success,” LeAnne tells me as we sip coffee I poured from my Thermos. “Most entrepreneurs believe if you set goals, success will follow. The problem is that goals must align with our beliefs and values or they will never be achieved.

“Our core beliefs, values and mission, when truly aligned with the power of our vision, allow results to achieve themselves. The secret is that the top of this pyramid—results—is supported by the bottom—beliefs—and by all the levels above beliefs: values, mission, vision, goals, objectives and finally back up to results.”



Secret 3 ~ Mind

Our business requires alignment.

“Build and operate using a solid foundation for success.”

I must have looked mystified, because LeAnne adds, “Yes! Results *do* achieve themselves. And that’s not an accident when our character, made up of our core values and beliefs, is part of our everyday operating standards. **Our business succeeds because we truly believe we are of value and service to others.** We find our higher Self here, and we honor others by remaining present of mind. Compromised values mean compromised integrity. When we incorporate our integrity in everything we do—true integrity—we give up false pride and ego.

“We must define the character of our business, or it will be defined for us by those around us. We need to take the time to clarify our values, beliefs, missions, visions, goals, objectives and the results we desire. We also need to be clear on the actions necessary to succeed.

“It is up to us as leaders to take the time to invite those of like mind and character to help us build our dreams. The fact is, not everyone *can* help us achieve our goals. If we do not build systems that help us screen for the right people, in the right way, we will end up with less profit and lower personal satisfaction to show for our trouble.”

LeAnne looks up from the pyramid she’s drawn and asks, “Does this sound familiar to you now, Mark?”

“Yes, I think I knew this when it comes to my personal life, but I didn’t see how it related to my business,” I confess. “I understand that you are judged by the company you keep, so to speak. If you want to succeed in life, you need to keep good friends around you.”

“That’s a great start, Mark. The next step is to remember that people need to go through life willing to have their beliefs challenged. Some people never outwardly challenge their beliefs or what is sacred to them. What you believe is true is created by how you see yourself and what is important to you. **If you believe you can—you can. And if you believe you cannot—you cannot.**

“Most small business owners are so busy working they don’t realize how important this is to the success of their business. Their business thought process needs to reflect who they truly are; otherwise they operate out of whack, without integrity. The harder things get, the more out of whack their business gets. If they don’t stop long enough to notice that they’re doing things against their belief system, they are not true to their beliefs. And that makes for a shaky business.

“In other words, Mark, if you believe certain things, your business has to reflect those beliefs to be in alignment. This is essential—it’s the bottom rung of your foundation for success.”

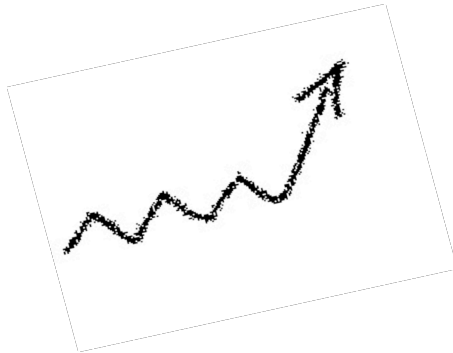
“I’m with you,” I tell her. “In fact, I’m hooked. Quick, tell me the other 4 Secrets!”

“Okay” she says, “but hang on to your socks.”

LeAnne scribbles in a fresh patch of soil, this time with up and down marks meandering across the ground. I can sure identify with ups and downs over the past few years.

“As the leader, our business energy and profits follows our emotional health and well-being.”

I watch LeAnne as she drags the stick upward and adds, “To stabilize our business profits and smooth our cash flow, we must take into consideration how we treat ourselves—how we motivate ourselves. Do we choose inspiring thoughts or desperate thoughts? Are we physically, spiritually and emotionally fit to run the daily business-management marathon?”



Secret 4 ~ Emotion

**Our business profit and satisfaction
follows our inner strength.**

“Let your emotional intelligence
actively guide your thought life.”

“We need to balance our emotional, spiritual and physical health so our moods remain stable.

When our moods are stable, we are better equipped to support others when they have a need or a problem. If we are moody or physically or emotionally unprepared, business situations can knock us off balance. Running a business requires minimizing surprises, especially situations and circumstances created by customer demands or employees’ lack of preparedness or training.

”Resolve Inner Conflicts. If you are the type of person who always jumps to the conclusion that you did something wrong or that the other guy is wrong, stop right there. Jumping to conclusions may be a sign that you rely too much on your personality to solve or address issues. Make sure that you get training, coaching or counseling on how to objectify business conditions and separate yourself from your business. A codependent or unhealthy relationship with your business can be a profit buster.

“And we need to be able to help our staff minimize their own surprises. In other words, every time a situation or circumstance arises, we need to be the emotional rock everyone can count on. When we aren’t prepared for that role, we send negative messages throughout our organization that the boss is displeased or angry. This is true even if our company is just us—we send these negative messages throughout our body.

“And like children, our company responds by taking it personally. Not that our employees are children, but the shockwaves in reaction reverberate through our business. This is primal, built into us as human beings to react in surprise when we do not receive the reaction we were looking for.

“Change is a process, not a result. There will always be a gap between what you expect in business and in the reality. Positive or negative, it is your job to lead and respond in ways that show others that you are not rattled or distracted by outcomes different from what you expected. Your job as founder and leader of your business is to help yourself and others through the shock, disbelief and resistance to this gap. That’s how you can all get to acknowledgement, exploration and adaptation to the truth.

“There are few *real* crises in business. People create crises because they lack information about how to solve issues. They go into fight or flight because our biology is designed to protect us from the saber-tooth tiger. But he’s not around anymore. Instead, we need to be aware of our actions and behave with steady-handed clarity. When you model that, people will follow you.”

LeAnne starts to go on, but I hold up my hand. I need to let all this information sink in. I am impressed how the ideas just flow so naturally from her, but I'm not as fast on the uptake as she is on the output. I close my eyes and see my business like a theater set in my mind. We're all running around, doing all the things she says not to do. I sigh a deep, mournful sigh. LeAnne puts her hand on my arm.

“Let me go on. I'm getting to the good stuff now.”

I smile and gesture with my hand to go on.

“So if you want your business to run in a stable fashion, you need to be its emotional rock. You want to always react in the way *it* requires, not in whatever mood you've brought to the office that day.”

I feel my face flush. I think about the lousy moods lately that I've inflicted on Sue and the rest of the team. No wonder the business is tanking.

“It often takes hours, sometimes days,” LeAnne adds, “for a business and its employees to recover from distractions brought about by the boss showing his shock, surprise or anger about a business situation. That is precious, unrecoverable time that could have been spent on smoothing cash flow, improving profit and increasing satisfaction for everyone involved.

“Our emotional awareness is even more important than intellectual or logical awareness.

This awareness is the crux of whether or not you’ll be outrageously successful in business.”

Wow, I think to myself, I'd never thought of my moods that way. I just figured I'm having a good day or a bad day. I never stopped to think that my emotions were affecting my business in positive or negative ways.

“Balanced spiritual, mental and psychical health are key to emotional wellbeing,” LeAnne continues. “Growing a business takes energy, focus and fitness. You need to stay in spiritual, mental and psychical training to meet the challenges of the day. You know what is right for you—what makes you feel good and what works for you. Eat right, exercise, drink lots of water, take breaks, take vacations. Enjoy some quiet time to visualize your easy productive day, each day. Meditate, pray, attend church or synagogue. Play with family and friends. Avoid drugs and alcohol or substances that can dull your senses and create mood swings.

“And you need to take time for yourself to remain fit for running your businesses. Build those emotional muscles you need to remain inspiring—and inspired. Your moods affect your profits. Inspiration or desperation—you choose your motivation. Good health and, most especially, stable emotional health are key to building a strong and stable business.”

“It’s not all about IQ,” she continues. Being smart doesn’t entitle you to success and certainly doesn’t guarantee it. Business intelligence comes from emotional intelligence. Your business won’t make you rich, but your emotional intelligence can. Your job as business owner is to separate your own intelligence from what your company demands of your skills. That means you don’t become confused about where you end and your business begins. In other words, you need to know how to separate yourself from your business.

So far the secrets LeAnne has shared have dealt shocking blows to my understanding of what business is supposed to be—and, more to the point, what business hasn't been for me. I hadn't thought much about the business all weekend. In fact, I had planned *not* to think about business. But here I am, on a mountaintop, receiving vital information without even asking for it. Or did I?

“These concepts,” LeAnne says, “have guided me to be more creative and move my business to the next stage of growth and development in ways I never thought possible.”

LeAnne takes a deep breath. She seems to need a break too. We decide to start walking back on a path that takes us along the ridge and over to the ranger station. We walk in comfortable silence for a while, and then for the next hour, LeAnne relates the last 3 Secrets.

LeAnne stops on the trail, finds a stick and draws a shape.

“An iceberg or a mountain with clouds?” I ask.

“Iceberg” she answers. “Business problems show up as tips of the iceberg—effects or experiences. But in reality they are the result of significant issues or the causes—the bottom of the iceberg—that need to be fixed in order to move the business forward.

“Problems or issues can also stem from how we make our choices, and the fact that choices and groups of choices turn into decisions by default. The choices we make come from many different layers: gut instincts, intuition, facts, anecdotes and others opinions—not just from one thing. So you have to understand what you are drawing from when you make choices and decisions. If you don’t get to the bottom of iceberg—near the dark ocean floor—where you can make your decisions on a deeper level, you’re not really speaking to the heart of the issue.



Secret 5 ~ Choice

Everything's a choice.

“Make good choices.”

The iceberg represents layers of choice, selecting substantive facts, not wishes or anecdotal information, to address business challenges and to make good decisions. And definitely not drawing from emotional reaction or fear, which generate false expectations that appear real. As business owners, we need to get to the bottom of the problem or challenge—not just address the superficial.

“Choose to take personal responsibility for helping yourself and others overcome problems. Assume it is your job to show people how to solve a problem, not to solve it. When you fix something instead of showing others how to do it, you create a bottleneck in your business. Everyone defers to you instead of becoming a partner in your business. Learning to rely on your self-leadership and role-modeling skills are key to achieving success in business. If you don’t know about these things, find someone to show you how. These skills are best earned through mentorship and coaching.

“Of all the insights, **clarifying your best business decision-making methods will save you and your business the most money and time.** And that means more money in your pocket. We must be clear that we are addressing the root issue or cause of the situation, objectively. This means the difference between simply keeping your business afloat and generating real wealth.

“Everything is a choice. Everything that happens in our business happens because we either made it happen or we forgot something. After all, we are in charge of everything, right? We forget, as our company grows larger, that every conversation involves agreements we make throughout the day that have consequences—often further reaching than we anticipated. We need to remember that choices are decisions and decision-making is a procedure, not a reaction.

Good business decisions are made by pausing and collecting input and feedback from everyone involved *before* we make a choice. It is your job as founder to slow down and use sound decision-making procedures to arrive at the best decisions for your business.

“Sometimes the only way to do that is to get help. If you do, be sure the help you get is qualified. Invest in yourself and your management team. Decisions made in a vacuum are not decisions, they are edicts. Make sure to include those affected in your choices and gather input from qualified sources of fact and information to make the best choices. Especially be careful of simply gathering facts that reinforce your preconceived notions or opinion.

“Seek out training and education on how to identify the real cause of problems in your business to make better decisions. You want to be sure to address the real business issues, not just the symptoms.”

I pause by a particularly beautiful vista. I feel a sense of clarity, even though I still have so many questions for LeAnne.

“How do you tell if you are solving the right problem in the first place?” I ask, feeling foolish for not knowing the answer. Then I remember LeAnne just told me to ask for help.

“If you didn’t solve the right problem,”
LeAnne says, “the problem returns, like a boomerang. It continues to negatively impact your business. The root of the problem is never what we initially think it is, by the way. We must surrender to the possibility that we may learn lessons about better decision-making every day of our lives.”

We continue to walk, discussing what led each of us to seek more information about how to make better business decisions. We compare notes on how we felt driven, yet trapped, at the same time. The dread we felt as we had to go through some of the most challenging situations of our lives, without much experience or frame of reference. We discover that we each knew it was our destiny to be independent, self-reliant, powerfully creative and definitely self-employed.

The difference is that LeAnne got help to overcome her road blocks. I haven't! In fact, until today, I thought asking for help was weak and spineless. All the people I know with their own businesses seem to be going it alone, without any help—and they're doing just fine. Or so it seems from my perspective.

LeAnne picks up a rock and draws several lines on a large flat rock. “A straight line with another line intersecting back and forth,” she says. “That’s **Destination.**”

“The act of founding, running and growing our own business is like sailing a great ship. Course corrections are a fact of life. Some things you can control, and some you cannot. Identify issues, gather information, plot a destination and use new information to help maintain your course. You would never sail a ship without a destination plotted and everything carefully laid out before leaving port. You’d run the risk of loss of life in the middle of the sea.



Secret 6 ~ Destination

**Clearly observed milestones
help speed us to our destination.**

“Choose your destiny or it will choose you.”

“Yet many entrepreneurs never bother to create a business plan, establish contingencies or plot necessary course corrections prior to setting sail in their own company—much less avail themselves of qualified outside help. They just wing it, reacting to whatever comes along. Could you imagine being the captain of a ship and neglecting to plan for inclement weather? Well, entrepreneurs do this all the time. Somehow they think if they discuss the bad stuff that will make it happen. Or maybe creating a plan is playing too much by the rules, eliminating some of their freedom. Of course, a plan actually creates the opposite: more freedom and more control. For some, the idea of a plan never occurred to them; it may have been outside their frame of reference.

“Whatever the reason, it’s not smart business.

When your destination is clear and your journey plotted, you know when you are safe and when you are not. You can anticipate what to change when you get into deep water so you can keep your business alive and healthy. You can weather the storms by anticipating your needs and correcting course in advance.”

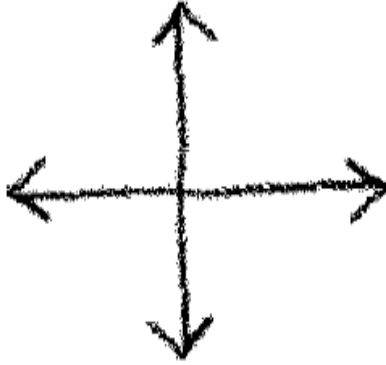
I was blown away! This information seems so simple, yet I hadn't put any of it together before. I wanted more, the rest of the secrets. I also wondered how I would apply it to help my situation.

I sense that we are getting close to the ranger station, but I need to stop for a break. We sit in the shade of a large, granite outcrop, and LeAnne again has some sandy soil for drawing. Her hand makes something that looks like the points of a compass, and I think to myself, finally, something looks familiar! But I soon learn its real meaning.

“The vertical axis is commitment,” she explains. “The horizontal is skill. Ideally the skill and commitment or desire lines should be equal, indicating a balance of skill and desire. If desire outweighs skill, over time founders burn out. They continually have to step in and fill skill gaps with their personality, instead of relying on systems. Over time, this becomes the point of diminishing return.

“**Competence** is accountability to standards: comparing and contrasting what is needed against our current skill levels in areas our business demands.”

“Say that again,” I say. It felt good to ask for clarification and not feel as though I were an idiot. I am starting to like the feeling of getting help.



Secret 7 ~ Competency

Our business demands specific skills of us.

“Your business holds you accountable to what it needs.”

“The Secret of competence answers the common problem that arises when our business demands us to be good leaders, managers and supervisors, but our skills lie in other areas of the business,” LeAnne explains. **“You have to take charge of your own competency in order to become outrageously successful in business.** That means you have to pursue a course of ongoing education on subjects your business demands of you, not just the things you want or like.”

Geez, I had never thought about myself as a leader, just one of the guys. So what did *that* mean?

“As the founder,” LeAnne explains, “you need to measure your competence in the three key areas: leadership, management and supervision. For example, how do you tell if you—and everyone in your organization—are doing a good job? And more importantly, **ask yourself what you need to do if you discover you are *not* doing a good job?** You must fearlessly choose self-improvement and build career paths for everyone in your company to measure competency for success.

“Employee and company productivity and financial performance are at the root of business competence. Using resources wisely reflects your ability to know the difference. Be willing to get the education you need to hold yourself and others accountable to building skills and training. That’s true business competency.

“This is the paradox all entrepreneurs face: How do we strike a balance between our passion, drive and sheer force of will, which too often override common sense? This gets especially tricky when we perceive these very traits to be what got us where we are today. Whatever brought us to this point, if we want our business to be amazing, we have to look at our competency as a manager or supervisor. We can’t take our business further without solid skills in leadership and management. These are beyond what we think is important—they’re what the company requires of us.

“Seek higher competency in the areas that matter most to your business. You will have to learn many new things to become successful in addition to your trade-craft: leadership, management and supervision. Becoming competent in the areas your business demands—not only what you choose—is key to higher profits and personal satisfaction. You will need to be objective about your own performance. Prepare an ideal job description that includes the skills and responsibilities of a person who could run any company—not just yours. Hold yourself to a higher standard of performance. Don’t focus on the technical areas you are familiar with. Instead, focus on those areas necessary to run your business smoothly, profitably and dependably.

“And remember that you need to work in ways that help you achieve personal satisfaction too. Openly seek and graciously receive feedback for your own personal and professional growth. Learn to hear and apply what you need to thrive.”

LeAnne picks up her stick again, then smiles at me. “Ready for the secrets to your success?”

I just shake my head in wonder.

“Competency is that driving force within us that becomes our worthy opponent if we don’t seek balance between skill and commitment in business. We must balance our commitment with our skill or required competency in order to effectively run a business. We can’t simply do what we want to.”

This Secret really hits home. Even though my head is chattering with so many questions, I remain quiet—for now—and listen.

“As we continue to replace what *needs* to get done with what we *want or know how* to do, we stray off course,” LeAnne adds. “And when we continue to do what is familiar, even when faced with the truth of what is needed from us, we get so far off course we lose the ability to change course.”

“Have you ever felt as though everything in your business depends on you? That if you had to leave for a day, the business would fall apart? That’s because you are filling in the skill gaps required by the business with your personality.”

“Boy, have I ever. It feels like the ‘Twilight Zone,’ and any moment Rod Serling will pop out from behind a tree. I see myself just off to the left of the screen, behind bars in an enclosed room, with people from another planet watching me in my habitat—the office—wondering what that human was thinking. Why does he do such things? Why would he make his life so hard?”

LeAnne laughs hard, the first time we've had a good belly laugh together.

“Me too” she says. “Only my show was the ‘Outer Limits.’ ‘Don't bother to adjust your set, you are not in control.’”

We laugh some more, but then the humor wanes. Hearing the 7th Secret is painful for me. I realize that my desire far outweighed my skills, and I had conveniently ignored that fact for quite a while. I used excuses with myself about not having enough time or money. Or it wasn't a priority. I'll get around to it eventually, I'd say to myself, and just put it on my to-do list for later. Yet I knew deep down that I was avoiding facing the truth. I just didn't know why.

I can see now how I spent too much time working *in* my business instead of *on* me. I was so obsessed with making sure everything was done right that I never even asked myself if we were doing the right thing in the first place.

“Bingo!” I shout when I come out of my flashback. “That certainly sums up my life—and all its problems.”

“Don’t beat yourself up, Mark. This is something we all have in common. I would have never become aware of the fact that I was too involved outside myself if I hadn’t realized how utterly dissatisfied I was with my current situation. I had no balance in my life. I thought I was *supposed* to be the one with all the answers. I would never have brought in outside help to guide me through the learning process if I hadn’t been about to lose everything. That’s what made me sit up and take notice.

“But maybe we all have to get to that point. Subtleties escape us because we are just too busy to notice, until it’s almost too late.”

We’re getting close to the trailhead, and we share more silence than conversation. My mind is full of new ways of seeing old experiences. Old habits framed in new ways. I’m filled with a sense that there might be hope for me and my business yet. I can see clearly for the first time just how over my head I was. I had promoted myself into a position I was ill-equipped to handle. Not that I couldn’t learn how, but right now, I needed to get help to fill some of the skill gaps.

I had spent so much time hoping and working hard to make the business work that I didn’t notice how my own choices had driven me into a state of despair. I now understood the future of my business was dependent on finding the right people to help me solve my current challenges. If I am ever to get out of this hole, the first thing I should do is stop digging.

I laugh out loud when I realize that the job I hated—the one I was ready to chuck—only existed because I had created and perpetuated that job for myself instead of building a company. At the expense of that company.

I hadn't stopped to plan for my company's success. If I hadn't been working so hard, I might have noticed that as my business grew, I needed to have a different job inside my own company. The secrets, as I heard them today, revealed to me that just because I *can* do something doesn't mean I *should* do it. I had operated out of raw emotion for so long that balance in my life and work had become a foreign concept. I need to surround myself with people smarter than me if I ever hope to build a foundation for a real company.

I take a deep breath of this crisp mountain air and let out a big sigh. I could see how I drove my business into its current situation. I'm still not clear on how to change it, yet I felt surprisingly unburdened.

“That was i n c r e d i b l e!” I say, raising my arms in triumph. “I feel so uplifted!”

LeAnne doesn't respond. She seems to have fallen behind as the trail narrows. That's okay, I think to myself, I'm enjoying the quiet after so much talk.

I feel good that LeAnne seemed to become more relaxed as we talked about the insights. Maybe I wasn't a burden on her. I know I enjoy sharing hard-earned information to help others; I hope, and believe, she feels the same way.

I'm grateful to her for showing me that I'm not alone. I live in a world filled with entrepreneurs just like me. It's comforting to know that even really smart people can get into tough situations. I'm in one now, but I am actually looking forward to the future of my business. For the first time in a long time, I am genuinely eager to go back to work on Monday.

“So, LeAnne, where do I go to train on these insights?”

Silence. I turn to ask again, thinking she didn't hear me, but I don't see her. Funny, she didn't say goodbye. How weird. We had this incredible conversation, and then she just left. Oh well, maybe we'll see each other at the ranger station. I hope so. I still have a ton of questions: Who taught her? Would she help me implement the secrets in my business? How could we stay connected?

Back at the station, I check with the ranger on duty. “Has a raven-haired woman in her late thirties come through?” I ask.

“No, not recently. And I’ve been at the desk all afternoon. She’d need to pass this way to sign out.”

No LeAnne. I was still puzzled, but no matter. What she had to say was still ringing clearly in my head. Even if her departure was odd, it didn’t detract from her message. I had plenty of work to do, and I now knew how to get to it in a whole new way.

I sign out at the desk, say goodbye to the ranger, and head toward my Jeep at the far end of the parking lot. I toss my gear in the back seat, get in and drive off.

During my drive home, I can't quite shake LeAnne's strange departure. Someone who spent all this time with me, and then never says goodbye. Oh well, maybe she was uncomfortable about disclosing so much of herself and had just taken off.

Along the way, I think about how much work I have cut out for me, but I'm ready! Then it hits me: Oh *my God*, I didn't write anything down. I pull to the side of the road and rifle through my pack for my cell phone. With a bottle of water in my cup holder, my seat belt back on, I turn on the recorder on my cell, lay it down on the seat next to me and head down the highway, recording all the way home.

Home looked great; I'm exhausted. Never mind it's only 8:30 p.m. I take a quick shower, then tuck myself into bed and close my eyes, ready to rest well for the first time in months.

I wake up at 5:30 Monday morning feeling rested and energized. It felt incredible to be back in my own bed. I loved the mountains and the camp-outs, but my own bed was a welcome reprieve.

The mid-June sun is already climbing above the horizon. I sit up, stretch, and my thoughts head back to the mountains. To be honest, I'm still unnerved about LeAnne's departure. I begin to retrace in my head, step by step, my experiences over the last two days. Unreal. That's how they seem. I had received everything I needed to start getting myself and my business back on track.

As I dress for the day, I have a wild thought: I was so tired and depressed, maybe I had slept for two days in my own bed and the whole thing was a dream. But parts of it seem so compelling. I couldn't have dreamed the whole thing, could I? And can anyone really sleep for two days?

In my exhausted stupor, had I imagined the whole trip? Had this incredible journey, initially a flight to a safer place and time for me, been guided by a higher force? If so, that force had brought me just what I needed to refocus and re-energize me, so I could go back to the real work of growing my business. Growing me.

I go over to my closet and check my hiking boots. They're dusty, but they're always dusty. Same with my cap and jacket.

Finally, I give it up. I decide to surrender to not knowing. It doesn't matter if LeAnne said a proper good-bye or was real or if I dreamed the whole thing. My energy is renewed for my business. I'm not sure what lies ahead, but I do know that some things are going to change, big things. I'll start by calling a trusted business associate and asking for help. That's something I never thought I needed, but now know it's the right path, the better way, the wiser way.

Epilogue

A few days later, I anxiously await my appointment with the business strategist referred by my associate. As I wait, I recall something LeAnne told me that day:

“When I get into a place where focus is hard, or I need to re-energize my batteries,” she said, “I can tell because I notice I feel like I’m treading water. I pull out my 7 Secrets card and select which insight holds the key for that day or week. The simplicity of only seven choices helps me get my head around the issues and build a path back to balance and productivity for myself and my business. On my time, in my way, in my style.”

I'm holding my card, the one I made from my recorded notes, thinking about which secret I want to focus on, when Sue buzzes me. Ms. Chemin is here for our strategy session. I open the door, and Ms. Chemin's back is toward me. She has long raven hair and is slight of build. Her height is just right. I feel a frisson of energy run through me. LeAnne? I almost ask aloud.

Just then she turns and takes my outstretched hand. That's when I know this day will change my life and business.

Bring it on!

* * * *

Back Stuff

Warning! Understanding the 7 Secrets is easier than applying them in your business.

If you are serious about your intention to capitalize on the wisdom of thousands who've come before you, take time to engage your employees and managers. Ask your associates for help. Retain a qualified business advisor. Then set up an informal advisory board to help you remain accountable to your vision. And, of course, choose to apply The 7 Secrets of Business Wisdom every day.

SEVEN SECRETS Condensed

Symbols have represented important ideas that permeate all cultures since the dawn of time. Symbols can depict vast knowledge and reflect important ideas in the simplest of ways. Symbols can influence traditions, customs, values, beliefs, thoughts and behaviors.

The symbols of the Seven Secrets represent universal thought-patterns. As touchstones they can help us tune into the power of focus found within each of us. These symbols can be used to remind us of what's important in the moment. Use them to unlock the greatness within you every day.

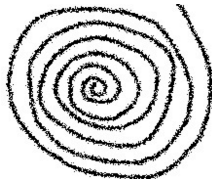


1. Understanding:

***We are our greatest strength
and limitation.***

“Transforming ourselves transforms our business.”

Business success comes in the form of rites of passage. We earn the right to move through each passage by completing the last. Not because we want to or think we have earned it, but because we’ve completed our lesson there.

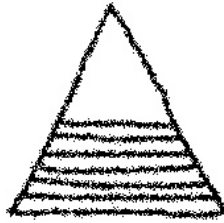


3. **Heart:**

Our business is a mirror.

“Listen and learn to look within to manage with an open heart.”

Allow yourself to receive what you need to learn in every form it comes to you. Use what works, not what everyone else is doing. Embrace personal responsibility and self-reliance beyond what is expected of you. Your business is a mirror for you; use the mirror to grow yourself and your business.

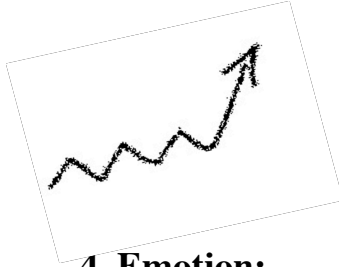


2. Mind:

Our business requires alignment.

“Build and operate using a solid foundation for success.”

Solidify your thought processes and center yourself with your values. Inventory and use your cherished beliefs and values to construct policies, procedures, and practices, inclusive of your employees, customer/clients, suppliers and prospects. Clearly define your mission, vision and goals. Establish smaller initiatives that support the larger, longer-term goals. Chart actions and measure them against results every day. Allow results to reveal themselves so your business can thrive.



4. Emotion:

Our business profit and satisfaction follows our inner strength.

“Let your emotional intelligence actively guide your thought life.”

Use your emotional intelligence to your advantage. Everyone has it, but few use it consistently. Take charge of your emotional maturity, focus and health. Set the tone as an intelligent leader, manager and supervisor. Take charge. Be your own mentor. Don't let moods rule your life—you rule your life.



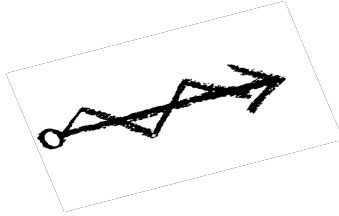
5. Choice:

Everything's a choice.

“Make good choices.”

Embrace personal change and accomplishment, not excuses. Choose to simplify your business life. Want a long-lasting solution? Address the root of each problem, not the symptom.

Use a good decision-making model. Stop issuing edicts; include those affected in your decision-making process. Stop shooting from the hip.

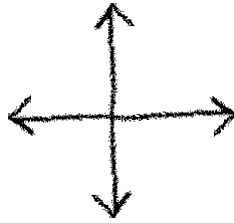


6. Destination:

**Clearly observed milestones
help speed us to our destination.**

“Choose your destiny or it will choose you.”

The shortest distance between two points is a benchmark in business. Plan for success. Define simple, short-term outcomes. Set daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly sales, productivity and financial goals. Tie daily actions to daily goals. Never let more than a few days or a week go by without proper redirection of your employees in order to make up for any missed objectives. When you are on course, celebrate it. When you are off course, redirect swiftly. Apply your lessons learned.



7. Competency:

Our business demands specific skills of us.

“Your business holds you accountable to what it needs.”

Measure required competencies. The three key results areas in running any business profitably are leadership, management and supervision. Create a clear ideal job description for yourself. Hold yourself accountable to what your business needs. Evaluate your own performance regularly. Not just in the areas you want and like, but in which your business needs you most. Be vigilant in your continuing education and supportive of others within your organization.

* * *

About The Author



Sherryl L. Dever is founder and CEO of The Business Resource and TheBusinessResource.com, a thirty-year-strong Small-business growth-consulting firm located in the Wine Country of Sonoma County, California.

As a self-ascribed member of the powerful “business-owner nation” (of which all entrepreneurs are a part), Sherryl has worked with hundreds of founder-led companies, including family-run businesses in all phases, in almost every industry.

Ms. Dever has personally facilitated more than 15,000 management, planning, training, coaching and consulting sessions in her career. Along with her team of uniquely qualified associates at The Business Resource, she specializes in transforming businesses into everything their owners want them to be. Along with the more traditional disciplines and standard business development practices, Sherryl and her team have used the 7 Secrets of Business Wisdom in troubleshooting and problem-solving for more than 500 client businesses. “We team up to improve profit and enhance satisfaction of everyone involved.”

For more information or to request a FREE Seven Secrets card of your own go to TheBusinessResource.com

* * *

On The Shoulders Of Giants

Patterns leading to the Seven Secrets were revealed to us through the more than five-thousand case studies of business owners connected with The Business Resource, Santa Rosa, California from 1986 to present. We are also grateful to those who's works helped to inspire this story.

Steven R. Covey – American author, educator and businessman.

“The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Powerful Lessons in Personal Change.” – Steven R. Covey. (1989 Free Press/Simon and Schuster.)

“The 8th Habit: From Effectiveness to Greatness.” – Steven R. Covey (2004 Free Press/Simon and Schuster.)

Jim Collins -- Author, speaker, American business consultant.

“Built to Last: Successful Habits of Visionary Companies.” – Jim Collins & Jerry I. Porras. (1994 Harper Business.)

“Good to Great: How the Mighty Fall: And Why Some Companies Never Give In.” Jim Collins. (2009 Harper Business.)

“Great by Choice: Uncertainty, Chaos, and Luck - Why Some Thrive Despite Them All.” Jim Collins & Morten Hansen. (2009 Harper Business.)

Daniel Jay Goleman – author, psychologist, and science journalist.

“Emotional Intelligence.” Daniel Jay Goleman (1995, Bantam Books.)

Shakti Gawain – Author and personal development proponent.

“Living in the Light: A Guide to Personal and Planetary Transformation.” Shakti Gawain and Laurel King. (1986 New World Library.)

“Creative Visualization: Use the Power of Your Imagination to Create What You Want in Life.”
Shakti Gawain – (1978, Nataraj Publishing)

Ken Blanchard – American author and management expert.

“The One Minute Manager.” Ken Blanchard and Spencer Johnson. (1982 William Morrow & Co.)

“Self-Leadership and The One-Minute Manager: Increasing Effectiveness Through Situational Leadership.” Ken Blanchard, Susan Fowler, Laurence Hawkins. (2005 William Morrow & Co.)

Stephen Mitchell – poet, translator, scholar, and anthologist. (Married to Byron Katie.)

“Tao Te Ching: A New English Version.” Stephen Mitchell. (1988 HarperCollins.)

Dr. Norman Vincent Peale – author, professional motivational speaker and minister.

“The Power of Positive Thinking: The Original Personal Success Program.” (1995 Audio book.)

Malcolm Gladwell – author and journalist writes for the Washington Post, and The New Yorker.

“The Tipping Point: How Little Things Can Make a Big Difference.” Malcolm Gladwell. (2006 Little, Brown and Company. Hachette Book Group.)

“Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking.”
Malcolm Gladwell. (2007 Little, Brown and Company.)

“Outliers: The Story of Success.”
Malcolm Gladwell. (2008 Little, Brown and Company)

Gregg Easterbrook – American writer, and a contributing editor of *The New Republic* and *The Atlantic Monthly*.

“The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse.” (2003 Random House.)

Daniel Jay Millman – American author and lecturer in the self-help field.

“Way of the Peaceful Warrior: A book that changes lives.” Daniel Jay Millman. (1980 HJ Kramer.)

Henry Ford – American industrialist, the founder of the Ford Motor Company, and sponsor of the development of the assembly line technique of mass production.

King James Bible – English translation of the Christian Bible for the Church of England. (1611.)

7 Secrets of Business Wisdom

As a small business owner...

...are you making the kind of money you think you should?

...have time to get everything done?

...have as much fun as you used to in your business?

This quick read gives business owners a glimpse into another reality. One where a journey back to the beginning leads to a whole new potential future. One where **true wealth; more time, money and meaning** exists.

7 Secrets Help You

- Understand your greatest strength
- Lead with an open heart
- Make good choices
- Take charge of your emotional focus
- Align for a sound foundation for success
- Choose your destiny
- Listen for what your business truly needs of you



Sherryl Dever

Author, speaker and business growth consultant, **Sherryl Dever** has personally facilitated more than 15,000 management, planning, training, coaching and consulting sessions in her 30-year career. Along with her team of uniquely qualified associates at The Business Resource, she specializes in transforming businesses into everything their owners want them to be. Along with the more traditional disciplines and standard business development practices, Sherryl and her team have used the *7 Secrets of Business Wisdom* in trouble-shooting and problem-solving with more than 500 client businesses.

Join the conversation: [f](#) [t](#) /sherryldever

Visit Us: 7secretsofbusinesswisdom.com

