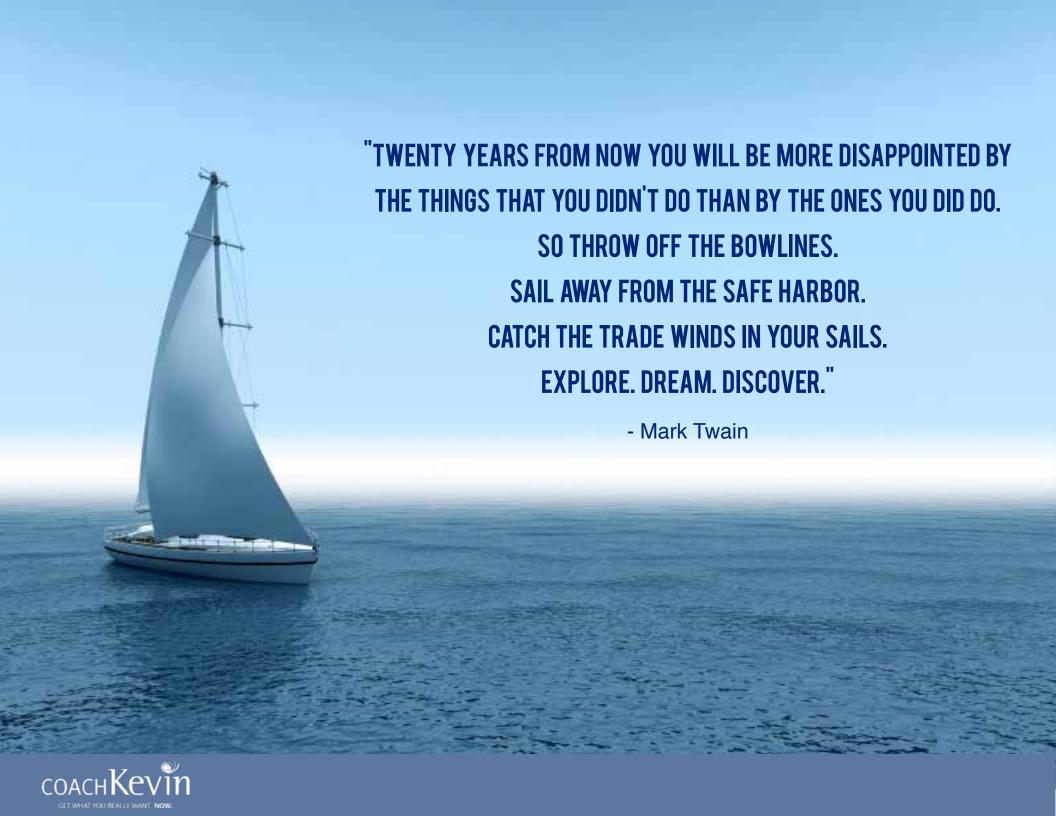


When I started coaching CEOs and Entrepreneurs more than a decade ago, I expected to see some similar challenges and opportunities amongst them; however, little did I know at the time just how much the same issues, obstacles and opportunities would arise. It doesn't matter whether or not clients are based in North America or internationally, which industry they operate in, their stage of growth, or if they are a company with seven employees or 7,000, the same principles used to ignite business performance apply.

Here are the 20 top principles that inspire business leaders, motivate employees with the desire to be the best and help CEOs and Entrepreneurs get what they really want now.





### THE LEADER SETS THE TONE

Looking inside many organizations you will find CEOs or entrepreneurs with an impressive level of passion, a relentless commitment to win and an inspiring vision that motivates their teams. They know what they really want and they are ready to take on the world to get it. They are also energized because they are doing what they love, and as a result can easily infuse the desire to be the best in their employees.

Contrast this with leaders who are on a steady path to exhaustion and burnout. Crushed by business demands, they struggle to keep up with the opportunities they have created, gradually losing their original excitement and momentum while simultaneously sucking massive energy out of their employees.

For leaders to secure their company's long-term success they must recognize the significant influence their actions, attitudes and approach to obstacles have on the entire team.

Leaders who set the tone for success:

- Are clear and honest about what they really want if they could have it their way (because they can).
- Are energized, alert and fully engaged to be the best; in fact, they are laser-focused on specific results;
- Take decisive action to get things done;
- Commit to conquering pivotal obstacles issues that can influence many outcomes refusing to tolerate anything less that what he or she really wants;
- Gain greater clarity, energy and momentum by overcoming obstacles and reaching new goals, which results in bigger or different dreams;
- Only do what energizes them; they refuse to get sucked into doing tasks that don't motivate them. These get delegated or outsourced.



### CREATE AN ENVIRONMENT THAT REALLY HELPS YOU THRIVE

If your work environment is not structured in a way that helps you thrive, you will lose interest, shut down and look for something else to focus your interests on, guaranteed. To make it even more challenging, everyone in your business and personal life will suffer, not just you.

Imagine what your work environment would need to resemble to be congruent with your personality, style and ambitions. Are you a business leader who excels at setting the vision, strategy and goals for the organization, or do you perform best as a chief operating officer who is focused on day-to-day operations?

Structure your business (and life for that matter) in a way that fits perfectly like a custom-made suit. Exclusively yours, you will be empowered to lead with energy and self-confidence, setting a clear tone that will influence employee behaviors, customer interactions, supplier relationships and overall business success.

Are you the type of person who starts the day at 6 am or do you excel in the late hours of the day? Are you more effective in your office or from the boardroom? Are you a business leader who is tired of traveling constantly or do you long for a 5-hour flight just to get some work done uninterrupted?

Set up your work environment in a way that helps you thrive so you stay focused, energized and driving your business to achieve outstanding results. It is okay to be different; actually, it is critical to your success.



### ATTRACT AND RETAIN A-MAZING PEOPLE

Exceptional talent is the lifeblood of organizations that embrace innovation, pursue customer excellence and have the wits to outsmart the competition. Why tolerate less than A players? It's your company hence you are ultimately responsible for increasing its value.

So what do you do if you don't believe you have the right employees? You have two options.

- 1. You need to communicate your performance expectations in a crystal clear and measurable way, and then give employees the chance to meet the bar. If they are not meeting expectations, you have a duty to be absolutely specific about what they need to do to perform as required for the role. For example, if you do not do X, Y and Z you cannot meet the requirements of this role.
- If they are still underperforming then your second option is to let them go. It's okay, you made a
  hiring mistake it happens all the time. It may be the wrong company, role or even industry for them.
  Correcting the mistake now is critical before it becomes detrimental to your team, your customers and
  your company.

These are very hard decisions but if you don't make them, you will only destroy and dilute teams – because everyone knows the underperformer should go – and diminish overall morale and/ or the desire to give their best.

Beware of the most dangerous types of employees: the high performing, but toxic personalities – bright people who simply irritate everyone in the organization with their negative behaviors and attitudes because they have different beliefs and a work style that is incongruent with the values of the company.

Importantly, use expert help and personality profiles to guide your hiring decisions so that you only attract and retain A-mazing people.



### EARN THE HEARTS AND MINDS OF YOUR EMPLOYEES

Stronger companies are emerging from the economic downturn filled with employees who have the desire to compete and win in the market. How can you improve employee engagement and create a winning team? Check out these low cost strategies.

- Have you acknowledged your employees recently in a non-monetary way? It is amazing what a simple "thank-you" or note of gratitude can do to boost morale.
- How well do you know your employees? Try reciting three or more personal things about them.
- When was the last time you involved your employees in important decision-making processes? Try it; they will feel a greater sense of ownership of the outcomes.
- Do you know your A players' career goals? Are you helping them achieve their next goal?
- Do you provide A players with meaningful learning opportunities?
- · Have you given your employees performance feedback lately?
- Do you celebrate your team's successes?



## USE EMAIL TO BOOST PERFORMANCE, NOT HINDER IT

Email can help us save time and be more productive, but when we go on email autopilot – checking our inbox repeatedly, typing out messages rather than engaging in conversations, copying people who are only peripherally involved along with a host of other bad habits – email can make us more busy than productive.

#### Get smart with these email habits:

- Turn off the audio alert for your inbox and stay focused rather than being constantly distracted.
- Check email two to four times per day; have your colleagues call you directly if something urgent arises.
- For each email you have five choices: handle immediately, forward/delegate, file, flag for later follow-up, or delete. Do not let messages pile up in your inbox to be ignored.
- If you want someone to take action, address the message to that specific person. Only cc someone if they need to be aware of the information you are sending.
- Email is intended to be short one idea per paragraph and no more than two or three paragraphs. Clearly specify the response you want phone call, follow-up, review or meeting.
- Use the subject line to inform the recipient about the message content, level of urgency and response required.
- Ban the use of email for messages that say: "I got it" or "thanks."
- Establish a corporate-wide email retention/deletion policy.
- Do not write an email if it is faster to pick up the phone.

"I have yet to see a job description that says 'must have high competency in responding to email.' People are not hired to respond to email, yet their lives become burdened by their inbox." – Kevin Lawrence



## ENCOURAGE MEETINGS THAT ARE MAGNIFICENT INSTEAD OF MEDIOCRE

Meetings can foster collaboration, innovation and action yet most employees gasp with frustration at the thought of another meeting. Stop encouraging meeting mediocrity and instead use every meeting to make things happen with these tips:

- 1. Ask yourself, does this meeting really need to happen?
- 2. Select participants wisely does everyone really need to be in the meeting?
- 3. Provide an agenda to participants in advance.
- 4. Clearly determine and communicate the intended meeting outcomes so that participants understand the purpose and benefits of meeting.
- 5. If attendees are required to review information in advance, send it to them prior to the meeting; do not waste time reviewing documents during the meeting.
- 6. Establish standard meeting etiquette that is used consistently. For example, start and end on time and give everyone the opportunity to contribute to the discussion.
- 7. Instill an action-driven culture even during meetings.
- 8. Document assigned actions and the person or team responsible for each action; everyone needs to leave with meaningful things to accomplish.
- 9. Communicate when actions must be completed; follow up on each action to ensure completion.
- 10. Have someone take notes ideally a support person so the CEO or executive team can think rather then write or type.
- 11. Encourage collaboration but stay focused, otherwise meetings will always take up the time allotted.
- 12. Recap actions at the end and then send a summary to everyone within half an hour.



### LICK THE TOAD

The Princess and Frog may be wowing audiences once again; however, this classic tale has plagued many CEOs and entrepreneurs and continues to do so. It is a story where an unhappy Princess frees a handsome Prince from a frog's body with a juicy, wet kiss. Imagine if she had avoided kissing the disgusting Toad; she would have missed a fabulous opportunity.

We all have nasty Toads in our life: every problem, issue and situation you would prefer to avoid but have to deal with is a Toad. They come in all shapes and sizes, but you cannot hide from them, even if you try and set them aside. In fact, when you hope they will go away, they just come back bigger, smellier and slimier.

These Toads are not only distractions, but they also waste time and energy. You need to free up your mental bandwidth for more important and valuable priorities.



- 1. Identify and list your Toads: all the big and little micro-irritating things you are avoiding.
- 2. Acknowledge the reasons you have not taken action yet.
- 3. List the benefits you will receive from getting them done; also list the cost of continuing to procrastinate.
- 4. Identify manageable steps to overcome your Toads along with a deadline for each step.
- 5. Commit fully to licking each Toad. "I'll try," is not an option.
- 6. Get help and support; in fact, get more help that you think you will need.
- 7. Reward yourself once you lick each Toad.



## DO YOU REALLY KNOW WHAT YOUR CUSTOMERS WANT?

Many companies assume they know what their customers want. This is not the time to make assumptions. Customers have choice, they have information at their fingertips. To survive, you must know what your customers really want and what you can offer them that absolutely no one else can provide.

It is time to shake up your assumptions.

- What do your customers really value from their perspective not yours?
- · Have you asked your customers what drives them to do business with you?
- Are their experiences with you extraordinary, or indifferent? The latter is not a winning customer experience strategy.
- What attracted them to buy from you in the first place? Use this insight to attract similar customers.
- · What do you need to do differently to increase the value they receive from you?
- Are mechanisms in place for you to receive ongoing customer feedback so you can adapt, grow and win in the market? Social media gives customers a ubiquitous channel to share their feedback whether you like it or not. Your ability to capture their feedback first and authentically take action will set you apart.
- Does your company merely serve customers, or engage in life-long customer relationship building?
   Ideally, your entire organization, including the executive team, encourages interactions with customers.

The choice is yours to listen to customers – they can always find alternatives if they do not get what they really want. The problem is we often fail to ask their opinions until they leave – what a waste!



## HAVE YOU EATEN YOUR FEEDBACK FOR BREAKFAST?

Leading your business without customer, employee or supplier feedback is like driving a car with your foot on the gas but with no map, directions or idea of where you are going. This simply wastes time and energy.

Feedback is absolutely imperative to igniting and navigating your business to success. Otherwise you simply force your expectations on what your critical stakeholder groups want without really understanding the value and perception they place – or do not place – on what you have to offer. This can be a painful experience in a global economy that is driven by information and choice. The only way you can develop, adapt or expand your business strategy, or address the defects in it, is to wake up everyday energized to tap into opinions and insight that will benefit you now and in the future.

Confronted with direct evidence of the value you bring, you can reinforce your winning strategy, processes, products and services. Alternatively, if the feedback points to significant shortcomings, you will certainly have strong rationale for change.

Eat feedback for breakfast by:

- Relentlessly using 360 degree surveys with customers, employees, leaders and suppliers;
- Treating your employees like customers by trialing new products and services with them; if they believe in the value of what you are selling, they will be your best champions and brand ambassadors;
- Using a third party to obtain confidential and absolutely honest information;
- Implementing improvements and communicating the changes made as result of feedback provided; and
- Securing feedback regularly; you will be in a better position to deliver what you stakeholders want.



## MOBILIZE EMPLOYEES TO ACHIEVE YOUR #1 GOAL

Igniting your business to achieve outstanding results repeatedly is not an impossible feat particularly if your entire team is mobilized to succeed. Business leaders globally have used the 'quarterly theme' method from Mastering the Rockefeller Habits to drive one major improvement each quarter.

To be successful the quarterly theme requires:

- A single person who will champion each quarterly campaign;
- A clear, measureable goal one key performance indicator or behavior that you need to improve, which will get everyone focused.
- Simplicity. Do not over complicate your quarterly goal; keep it simple. For example, your goal may be to reduce the average number of days it takes to collect receivables. Or, it may to increase the number of projects completed each quarter.
- Regular, and ideally daily, feedback on the results and the impact on customers so employees know whether they are succeeding or failing;
- Authentic communication on what needs to be done if the campaign is not meeting expectations; and
- Incentives to encourage and motivate employees the incentives do not have to be huge; it is more about the energy and excitement the theme generates.

Finally, celebrate your successes each quarter and debrief on why the campaign was successful. If the campaign fails to achieve the desired results, analyze the shortcomings to improve the success of future themes.

Just imagine the impact if you have every person in your company thinking every day about how to solve just one additional problem for your customers.



## MASTER YOUR ABILITY TO DELIVER ON BIG PROMISES

Marketing campaigns work best when they speak to customers' biggest needs or pains and show how your products or services can give them what they really want and value.

Many companies struggle to market effectively because they communicate messages that do not capture the attention or interest of potential customers. There are also companies who are marketing masters, yet they fail to live up to the great expectations they communicated, which lured customers in the door in the first place. Feeling misled, oversold and completely frustrated, these customers can do significant harm to your reputation by sharing their disappointment with other potential customers, actually ex-potential by this time.

Marketing mastery is promising to fulfill the core needs and desires of your potential customers, and having the entire business structured to consistently deliver on those promises. Every person and process in the company from sales and service, reception and accounting to the executive team and janitorial and security staff delivers on promises to your customers. Your business should not only be structured to deliver, but it also needs mechanisms in place to make sure – in a very clear and measureable way – that you are delivering what you say you will to your customers.

These businesses exemplify the model of Promise Delivery Systems – they make the right promises and then fanatically and consistently deliver. They also measure results and hold everyone accountable for the customer experience.

In return, customers reward them with revenue, loyalty and importantly, referrals.



## DRIVE YOUR BUSINESS BY THE RIGHT NUMBERS

How do you know if you are driving your business by the right numbers? Just imagine. If you had to be out of the country for six months and were absolutely unable to communicate with anyone, what are the 3 to 5 numbers you would want people to focus on to guarantee strong financial results?

Most people are completely in the dark with their numbers, both professionally and personally. Why drive your business blindly? To ignite your business, you must create an insight-driven organization by identifying, monitoring and benchmarking the key drivers of your business – the leading indicators.

Most business leaders are far too busy to review 72 lines of operational data on a regular basis, or key numbers in isolation, so they need a system that identifies and reports on the top 3 to 5 leading numbers, and the top 3 to 5 lagging numbers in the business. If the top leading and lagging numbers improve then typically all numbers become better.

Consider the CEO who needs to grow revenue and knows that for every 5 requests for proposals, the team can close 3 deals. The numbers she needs to watch to grow revenue are 5 requests for proposals and 3 deals. You also need to watch numbers in relation to a goal. For example, if you have \$200,000 in really high, old accounts receivables greater than 60 days, and the goal is to get to \$50,000, you need to always watch the number in relation to the goal. The key is to track daily or weekly the numbers that are the underlying driver of sales, productivity and quarterly priorities.



### **DECISIONS** \* **ACTIONS** = **RESULTS**

Do you walk the walk, or simply talk the talk?

One of the benefits of being an entrepreneur is that you do not have to report to anyone. Yet this benefit becomes is a significant liability for exactly same reason – no one is holding you accountable to achieve results. For example, you say you do not procrastinate, but your employees have not had performance reviews in over a year. You say you value customer feedback, and yet there is no formal feedback process in place to truly understand how your customers really feel about doing business with you.

How can you create massive value for your customers and employees if you do not take action to make it happen? When you follow through with your commitments, it demonstrates trust and personal integrity.

#### Trust + Integrity = Credibility

You also need to set goals and commit fully. Decisions alone are great, but they need to be followed through with actions. Actions alone are great, but if they are not based on a big decision, results can be elusive too. For example, if you make one decision with ten actions, you get a result of ten. If you make ten decisions with ten actions each, you get a result of one hundred.

#### **Decisions** \* **Actions** = **Results**.

How is your formula working? Are you making more decisions, taking more actions, or doing both?



### **EXPEL THE ELEPHANTS**

Companies can unwittingly be a safe haven for problems, personalities, belief systems or behaviors that are so obvious yet no one wants to address them. These elephants in the room are detrimental to business performance if they are not purged from the organization.

Are you harboring elephants in your hallways and boardrooms? If so, identify them and begin methodically expelling them from your business. This may involve difficult decisions but harboring elephants will only hold you back while simultaneously frustrating talented employees who will simply come to believe that substandard performance is acceptable.



Ask yourself, does it make sense to keep this product, person, belief system or behavior if they are really not adding value and contributing to the success of your company? If the answer is "no," why keep barriers to progress, performance and results in place?



#### Elephants could be:

- · A person who has been in the company far too long; it could even be one of the first employees;
- Unprofitable products or lines of business that everyone knows are failing but they do not want to eliminate; it could even be the product that started it all for your company but is no longer a hot seller in the market;
- Processes or systems that have a loyal following despite the clear lack of value they contribute to the organization;
- · An acquisition or investment that really does not fit with your core business strategy;
- Partnerships or joint ventures that are in name only; or
- · Suppliers that no longer add value.

In every quarterly meeting, ensure the executive team talks about the biggest elephants in the room, or as Jim Collins says "brutal facts." Initially there are never any, but after an awkward 30 second silence, there are always one or two.

What are your elephants?



### DEBATE VIGOROUSLY BUT COME AWAY AS FRIENDS

Building high performance executive teams in situations where leaders cannot come together to agree on strategies is deeply frustrating for CEOs and entrepreneurs.

These conflicts are also more than apparent to employees and generally signal a lack of co-operation, consensus and camaraderie, which is detrimental. Often the lack of alignment amongst executive leaders is due to conflicting personality and communications styles coming to fruition during the decision-making process. It can also be due to a deep-rooted lack of trust, which can hinder ongoing working relationships. Debate is critical for good decision-making and in fact it is essential if you want to benefit from the all minds of the different people on your team. Overcome chaos at the executive level by learning how to debate in a way that builds team dynamics rather than shutting them down.

#### Here are some tips:

- Understand each leader's unique personality and communication style and how they contribute to overall team dynamics;
- Establish strong rules of engagement, giving leaders the ability to contribute to and debate different opinions during the decision-making process;
- Take your executive team out of the office for half a day every month; use the time together to think about current challenges or issues (3 to 6 months) that need to be addressed by the team. Also plan strategically for opportunities and challenges over a 6 to 36 month horizon; and
- Avoid the lure of being sucked into debating the day-to-day operational activities while losing sense of the bigger picture along the way.

You must disagree and debate in order to make good decisions and create a strong team. The challenge is how! What style will work for you as a team?



### SLASH THE KNOT

What does Alexander the Great have in common with Richard Branson, Michael Dell and Jim Pattison? Alexander the Great lived only 33 years but in that short time he forged the greatest contiguous empire the world has ever known. At the age of 20, Alexander arrived in the city of Gordium, a long forgotten city near the present day capital of Turkey. Upon arrival, he faced a seemingly insurmountable problem — the famous Gordian Knot — a knot so large and complex that for generations no one had ever been able to undo it. In fact, the prophecy was: "Whosoever undoes this Gordian Knot will rule over all of Asia." Alexander studied the knot for a few moments; there were no ends visible or even a place to begin unraveling it. Yet he was a man of decisive action and in an instant, with a single stroke of his sword, he slashed through it.

Alexander the Great, Bill Gates, Donald Trump, Richard Branson, Jim Pattison, Michael Dell and a host of lesser known but highly successful entrepreneurs all share this one significant trait: Whenever they encounter a major obstacle – a Gordian Knot – they act decisively and instinctively, and slash it.

To understand the difference between Gordian Knots and regular knots you have to look at the size and complexity of the obstacle at hand and then determine whether or not the obstacle is actually a root cause of other problems. Simply put, a knot is a problem; a Gordian Knot is the root cause of the problem. In fact, Gordian Knots can be your own fear or limiting belief, and regardless of how much you try and fix little knots independently, they keep coming back because you haven't tackled your Gordian Knot. For example, when faced with a lack of cash, many entrepreneurs increase their line of credit. The immediate problem – the lack of cash (the knot) – is solved, but the underlying cause and most important factor – the fact that the business is growing faster than its cash flow will allow it, remains.

By dealing with the Gordian Knot, many leaders discover that they not only solve their lack of cash, but they also improve many other aspects as well, for example, customer relationships improve, overhead costs decrease and product or service quality improves, to name a few. What is a root cause, or Gordian knot, of many of your current problems?



## FIVE STEPS TO UNCOVERING YOUR GORDIAN KNOTS

- 1. Take responsibility for finding out what is standing in the way of your goals rather than blaming other people and ignoring the real reasons; be honest with yourself.
- 2. List all of your current knots (problems) and determine the root cause of all of them. In most cases, the Gordian Knot will either be a fear or limiting belief that causes you to persistently face obstacles.
- 3. Look at the types of things you avoid dealing with and then find the fear or limiting belief; ask other people to list the things you tend to get stuck on the most.
- 4. List out the goals you previously had, but have not been able to achieve. Look at all the fun things you wanted to do but have not even begun to accomplish. What is holding you back from achieving your goals and enjoying an outrageous quality of life?
- 5. Gordian Knots often relate to something that has been following you throughout your career and life; it is usually way easier to determine, understand and overcome Gordian Knots if you work through them with someone else.

What are your Gordian Knots?





## STOPPING IS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS STARTING

Employees will famously share how their to do list is growing, resources are diminishing and they feel absolutely burdened and overwhelmed by their workloads. CEOs and entrepreneurs are driven to spark ideas, innovation and action, but it is equally important to consider eliminating things to make room for new business opportunities. Plan now to stop a whole bunch of things to make room for new and exciting growth opportunities. For example:

- Stop selling unprofitable products or services that deliver little or no value to your customers but put a
  massive strain on your organization to deliver.
- Stop competing head on with your competitors who are fighting to win the same potential customers.
- Stop wasting time on outdated processes that do nothing to improve business performance.
- Stop encouraging teams to produce reports and more reports that are rarely reviewed.
- · Start creating products and services that your customers really want.
- Start differentiating yourself from your competition in everything you do to win customers in new and untapped market spaces. In fact, start doing business with your competitors so you can discover first hand what you need to do to be different.
- Start utilizing only the processes that absolutely optimize business performance.
- Start focusing your employees on only the processes, products and services that add value to your customers or your company.



# DARE TO PLAY, EXPLORE AND BE INSPIRED CEOs and entrepreneurs usually run into major obstacles when they do not take enough

CEOs and entrepreneurs usually run into major obstacles when they do not take enough time off personally. Everyone needs downtime to think, to be inspired and to reinvigorate our minds and bodies. Give yourself permission to make time to play, – sometimes on company time – enjoy friends and family and do something completely different and fun.

Explore a new culture – it is amazing what a fresh perspective can bring to our lives. If you are traveling on business, stop to check out the local museum for an hour or two. Visit an art gallery to stimulate your creativity and nurture your mind. Savor the insights and experiences that different cultures can bring to you as you step back and reflect on your business.

And importantly, take your vacation; in fact, pre-book your vacation well in advance and take twice the amount of holidays you previously took. The more time you take, the more time you focus on planning for the highlights of your life, the clearer you will get on what you really want. You will also have far more energy to get you there.

Do you play and explore? Or are you solely investing yourself in your company? If it is the latter, stop now and write down five ways you will embrace the opportunity to play this year.

Commit to accomplishing this goal!

"You do not stop playing because you grow old, you grow old because you stop playing" – Kevin Lawrence





### **GIVE BACK**

CEOs and entrepreneurs thrive when they do things that excite them everyday.

They strive for their goal of creating a more enriching and rewarding life.

They have huge goals and tremendous desire to do what it takes to make things happen.

Often in pursuit of these goals, they become habitual workaholics,

always working, always squeezing deals.

Hopefully, they are not too busy working to forget how good it feels to give.

Embrace a passion to give back.

Give back to your communities with your heart, hands and money.

Experience giving yourself. Clean a park. Build a playhouse.

Mentor a teenager who is less fortunate.

Encourage your executive team and your employees to spearhead and participate in philanthropic efforts.

Where and how do you like to give back? Commit now to making a difference.

"The rewards from giving back will last a lifetime, certainly far longer than another hour of work."

— Kevin Lawrence







#### **Inspired?**

Write down the top 5 things you can do that will make a difference in your personal and professional life now.

#### **Motivated?**

Create your plan and act upon your top 5 list within the next 72 hours.

#### **Determined?**

Reward yourself when you accomplish your top 5 list in the next 72 hours.

Be bold. Be outrageous. Get what you *really* want now!



### **ABOUT KEVIN**

Kevin Lawrence is a strategic advisor and coach to CEOs and executive teams across North America and internationally. Driven by a relentless passion for helping business leaders get what they really want, in business and life, Kevin has coached clients across a wide range of industries, including consumer packaged goods, manufacturing, luxury retail, media, automotive and professional services. He deeply believes that CEOs and entrepreneurs can have tremendous business success along with an enriching, adventurous and fulfilling lifestyle, taking their professional and personal accomplishments to an entirely new level. For more information, visit www.CoachKevin.com



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