BE THE BEST AT WHAT MATTERS

The Only Strategy You Will Ever Need.

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The Only Strategy You Will Ever Need
Building Business at Bill’s Burgers

Bill owns a hamburger restaurant called Bill’s Burgers. Bill needs more customers. So Bill does what any bright, energetic entrepreneur would do: He looks for ways to build his business.

Bill has read lots of articles about the power of the Internet. Bill has decided to make a video about Bill’s Burgers, put it on YouTube, and have it go viral. In the video he plans to have babies doing funny things with hamburgers; some cute, playful puppies wearing tiny Bill’s Burgers T-shirts; and hopefully Jennifer Aniston enjoying a Bill’s Burger burger. The video will go viral, and people will flock to Bill’s Burgers in droves.

Of course, everyone knows that social media is the key to business success today. Bill is designing a Facebook page for his restaurant, and he is starting a blog. He thinks he’ll call it Bill’s Burger Blog. He will write about hamburgers and onion rings and the great things that happen in his restaurant. The blog will be connected to his new Twitter account, where he plans to regularly post 140-character updates on hamburgers and hamburger-related stuff.

“Amaze” and “Delight”

Bill also bought some books about business. Most of them say that he should be doing things that will make his business unique and one of a kind. They say that he needs to be wildly imaginative and innovative and do things that will “amaze” and “delight” his customers. Bill goes to hamburger restaurant conventions, and the speakers there tell really great stories about hamburger restaurants that have done the coolest, most amazing things with customers. Bill wants to be amazing, too.
Bill read in one of the books that to be amazing, you have to have a wow factor. He has decided to start giving every customer a tiny chocolate candy hamburger when they leave. He thinks this will be his wow factor. Bill also plans to have a magician circulate through the restaurant, doing card tricks and cutting a rope in half, then putting it back together again. People love magicians, and Bill is pretty sure that this will “amaze” and “delight” them and make Bill’s Burgers unique and one of a kind. No other restaurant in town has a staff magician.

**Moruga Scorpion Peppers**

Because he is willing to go the extra mile in differentiating his business, Bill is also going to add some wildly unique items to his menu to set him apart from his competition. He is considering adding a Vanilla Burger, a Cheese-to-the-Max Burger with 11 different kinds of cheese, a Cinnamon Apple Burger, a Volcano Burger with Trinidad Moruga Scorpion peppers, and a Really-Ham Burger, made with ham.

Bill is exhausted from pursuing all of these ideas and activities, but he’s excited because he is sure that by harnessing the power of the Internet and social media, having a wow factor and a magician who delights customers, and offering flavored hamburgers that are innovative and unique, his business will boom and he’ll have more customers in no time.

**What If He Made a Better Hamburger?**

Some of these ideas may well be worth pursuing. But if Bill asked me for advice, I’d suggest a different approach. It’s a wildly contrarian idea that flies in the face of much of what you read and hear today about what it takes to succeed in business.
I think Bill should begin by finding out what matters most to his customers, focusing there, and being the best at that. Maybe it’s really all about just making better hamburgers. I wonder if Bill’s thought about that.

**What Do You Think?**

You may be thinking, “It’s not an either/or proposition. Maybe Bill should make better hamburgers and have a magician.” You could be right. If a lot of Bill’s customers are families with small children, the magician might be just the ticket. I’m not trying to sell the idea that we shouldn’t do social media or try to delight customers with a magician. As for social media, I’m all in on the social media strategy. I just hired a social media company to work with our business. I’m simply putting forth the idea that if we do the handful of things that matter most, whatever those things may be, and if we do them better than our competition, then we win. That may include social media, candy hamburgers, and magicians. I’m just saying think about it. Pick your lanes carefully.

There’s no absolute right or wrong here. You need to find out what works for you in your own version of the Bill’s Burgers story.

**An Undeniable Premise**

Be the best at what matters most, and you will succeed.

Part of me says that I should now just write “The End” and leave it at that. But the realist in me knows that such a radical, contrarian, and amazingly simple idea will be met with skepticism and thus needs some fleshing out.

It is an undeniable premise. When you are the best at what matters most, you succeed. You may be thinking, “But surely
there must be more to it than that.” No, that’s it. The very simplicity of the idea is what makes it so powerful.

We Make It Too Complex

In the movie *The Big Lebowski*, Walter says to The Dude, “That’s right, Dude, the beauty of this is its simplicity. Once the plan gets too complex, everything can go wrong.”

Exactly.

Walter is right; most of us actually do make the plan too complex. We do it because, contrary to what most people might think, it’s much easier to make things complex. It takes a lot of hard work to, as Steve Jobs once said, “get your thinking clean enough to make things simple.” But it’s worth all the hard work, because if you’re able to make things simple, you can move mountains.

This book is about simplifying how you think about and go about your business. Focusing on what matters most helps you maximize your effectiveness. It helps you avoid the painful truth of the old saying “You did a great job. But you did the wrong job.”

That’s the Problem

Sometimes a client will say to me, “Joe, I’m doing everything I can think of to improve my business, but it’s not working.” That’s the problem. The winners in business aren’t the ones who do the most things. The winners are the ones who do the most important things.

What if you, your team, or your entire organization had absolute clarity about what was most important, and that’s where the energy was focused? Imagine the force multiplier of
that kind of shared sense of direction, purpose, and priorities. That’s our goal: to absolutely maximize your efficiency and, especially, your effectiveness.

We’re going to look at this idea of what matters most from a number of different perspectives, or through a variety of “lenses.”

**It Ends Up Being about the Customer**

One vitally important idea in this book is that, ultimately, be they large or small, in manufacturing, hospitality, or healthcare, providing cutting-edge technology or the most basic of products or services, all businesses that are able to create and sustain success will incorporate what matters most to the customer into their core strategy. This is the one element that isn’t optional. The needs of the customer must be satisfied. At some point, someone has to buy something. This is the common denominator of all businesses.

One thing that I often hear from my clients is “Our business is different. Our business isn’t like any other business.” Well, we all like to think we’re special, but your business really is pretty much like every other business in the ways that count the most. Really, it is.

Business is business, and although each organization is unique in some of the particulars and details, in the end we all make things, do things, or sell things with at least one of our goals being that people will pay us for doing it. The same idea holds true for a nonprofit organization if you think of gaining support, be it in the form of contributions or otherwise, as how you get “paid” so that you can do the work that helps your constituents.

Of course, you may also have bigger-picture goals such as wanting to change the world for the better or improve
people’s lives with your work, and that’s wonderful. But at some point somebody has to pay for something, or you don’t have a business; you have a hobby.

We will very purposefully explore many approaches to what matters most, with the purpose of raising questions that you, and only you, can answer for your business. But at our center will be this unifying principle of being the best at what matters the most to the customer.

**You’re Spread Too Thin**

Pressure is something you feel when you don’t know what the hell you’re doing.

—Peyton Manning

There are a lot of people feeling pressure these days. It’s not necessarily that, as Peyton Manning says, “you don’t know what the hell you’re doing.” It’s more likely that you’re not focused on what you should be doing.

What keeps many people awake at night is that they know that their business should be doing a lot better than it is or that their own individual performance should be creating greater results than it is. Leaders may know that they have great people and a great product or service, but they’re not producing the results that they should be producing with the resources they have.

Assuming you have the right people on board and you’re good at the basics of your business, you probably have the same problem that many highly competitive individuals and organizations have: You’re spread too thin. You’re trying to do too much. You’re using a flamethrower when you should be using a blue-tip flame from an acetylene torch. You need to focus. You need to pick a lane.
The Three or Four Things

It’s frustrating, stressful, and exhausting to try to do the 1,000 things you think you have to do to succeed. It’s also counter-productive. There are probably no more than three or four things you need to focus on as long as you do them exceptionally well.

If I just lost you with the idea of only needing to focus on three or four things, let me say it again with as much clarity as possible: If you do an extraordinary job on the three or four things that matter the most, not only will you succeed, you will likely succeed far beyond your expectations.

The reason people get sucked into the tornado of trying to do a thousand things each day is that they aren’t focused on those core activities that can actually advance their strategies. Because you’re not focused, you aren’t winning on the basics, and that’s when people start looking for gimmicks, shortcuts, or “silver bullets” to try to improve their results.

The cold, hard truth is that there are no shortcuts. There are no silver bullets. There are no gimmicks that can replace the reality of the marketplace—that, ultimately, quality wins.

You Don’t Need Gimmicks

Let’s get clear on what creates business success today. I recently heard someone say what so many people foolishly believe: “It’s not enough to be the best anymore. You have to have a wow factor to set yourself apart.”

Let me point out the screamingly obvious. If the marketplace decides that you are the best, that’s the biggest wow factor there is. Only those who are far from being the best would ever say that it’s not enough.
If you truly are the best, you don’t need gimmicks. But if your core value proposition is lacking, you’d better pile on all the glitz, buzzers, bells, and gimmicks you can and hope it will work. (It won’t.) Let me say that again. If you are not able to compete on the basics, then you quite naturally look for gimmicks as wow factors instead of letting quality and consistency be your wow factors.

If you truly are the best at what you do, are competitively priced (which may mean that you are the highest priced, as long as the value justifies it), and you are easy to do business with, you win. Every shred of evidence in the marketplace is telling us that now, more than ever, quality performance is the one sure factor that drives success.

Don’t confuse temporarily fashionable trends with sustained success. Don’t confuse a catchy story with performance. Look at who leads markets over a period of years and is able to sustain that lead through changing markets and economic conditions; then study how they do it. They don’t do it with contrived wow factors. They do it by dominating with quality and value. They do it with constant, relentless improvement and innovation. They do it by winning at the basics. That’s how they wow, as in, “Wow, these guys are so good, and they’re good every single time.”

If You Win on the Basics, You Win It All

You goal should be to be so good at the basics that you are cutting edge. You’ll see me refer to that idea again. It’s become one of my mantras.

By the way, I know that I lose some people simply by using the word basics. There are those who will roll their eyes and say, “Being good at the basics isn’t enough. That’s just table stakes. That just gets you in the game.”
Note that I’m not talking about just being good. I’m talking about being so good at the basics that you are extraordinary. I’m talking about not just being competitive but actually winning on the basics. Here’s reality: If you win on the basics, you win it all.

**There Are No Silver Bullets; There’s Just the Bomb**

I was in Orlando to give a speech on improving team performance to 500 entrepreneurs when a member of the audience came up to me and said, “I hope you’ve got some silver bullets for us today.” Sorry. I’ve been studying how companies succeed for more than 30 years, and I’ve never seen a single silver bullet. Never seen a shortcut.

There aren’t any silver bullets. Not one. There’s quality. That’s not a bullet. It’s the bomb. It always wins.

**Questions to Consider**

Thinking about the Bill’s Hamburgers story, consider these questions with your team:

- What’s your equivalent of hamburgers? What’s your core value offering?
- What’s the main thing that draws customers to you?
- What if you were 20 percent better at that main thing?
- What if you had a different main thing?
- What if Bill made hamburgers so amazingly good that people practically knocked down his door to buy them?
What’s your version of that?
If I ask you, your partners, or your employees what are the three things that matter most in your business, what would they say?
What would your customers say is most important to them?
Would your customers’ thoughts on what matters most match with yours?
More important than what anyone says, what do the people on your team do all day long every day?
What do you do all day long every day?
Are you doing the most important things?
What is the one thing you are doing that you know is a waste of time?
What kept you from creating greater value for your customers today?
What activities by you and your team will create the greatest return on effort and investment?

Think about whether you agree or disagree with these ideas. If you have business partners or colleagues, discuss how these ideas might relate to you; what, if any, value they have for you and what new ideas they serve to bring up for you:

Our business is very complicated. Agree or disagree?
Our business is actually pretty simple. Agree or disagree?
We could do better at doing the most important things. Agree or disagree?
If we were more focused, we would be more effective. Agree or disagree?
There are no shortcuts. There are no silver bullets. Agree or disagree?
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JOE CALLOWAY

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