PLAYING THE GAME.
CREATING GREATER ABUNDANCE AND ACCELERATED GROWTH

MICHAEL SMITH
"Only by giving are you able to receive more than you already have."
- Jim Rohin
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Imagine two accomplices locked in separate jail cells, each offered three choices by the police. One: if both confess to the charges, both will be jailed for five years. Two: if only one confesses, he will be freed but the other (the non-confessor) will be jailed for 10 years. Three: if neither confesses, both will be tried for minor offences and be jailed for only one year each.

If both know that the other will not treat it as a competition, that there doesn’t need to be a winner and a loser, then instead, they can take their collective interest into consideration and they can both win.

But how often does this happen?

If I assess every situation, opportunity, project, sale or initiative as a zero-sum game, then I’m making the assumption that in order for me to win, then you have to lose. Conversely, I’m assuming that in order for you to win, it’ll mean I have to lose.

In both game and economic theory, a zero-sum game is a mathematical representation of the conditions under which this occurs – that a participant’s gain (or loss) is exactly balanced by the losses (or gains) of the other. To put it differently, total gains plus total losses would have to equal zero. Or differently again, for me to gain the sale, you have to lose the sale.

Contrary to this theory, the idea of non-zero-sum describes a scenario whereby the participants’ aggregate gains and losses equal more than zero. And in this situation, one person’s loss (or gain) doesn’t equal another’s gain (or loss). In other words, we can both win.

The problem we have is that for the most part, we assume that our world and particularly our business world operate under zero-sum conditions. And to some extent, that’s the way we’ve been taught and conditioned that business and selling works.

Right, I’m going to do that before you do, otherwise I may lose!
If on the other hand we strive to work under the conditions of a non-zero sum game, then the actions that we take vary dramatically. If I’m not assuming that for you to win, I lose – and vice versa – then I’m likely to operate in a very different manner. My thinking will be different and as a result, the things I do will be very different.

And it’s these actions that sit at the heart of the idea of abundance versus the idea of scarcity. The notion that there isn’t enough opportunity out there for you, me and everyone else is only true if I’m operating under zero-sum conditions.

The challenge, though, with abundance and a non-zero-sum game is that there is no universally accepted solution. There is no single optimal strategy which is preferable to all, and with no predictable outcome. In some instances we’ll have mutually aligned objectives and in others, they’ll be contrasting.

But there are a handful of simple things which can be done to contribute to the creation of a non-zero-sum mindset and which can lead to the development of abundance.
In fact, if you want four simple ways to increase your sales, performance or outcomes, then incorporate these ideas today.

**GIVE TIME**

Yes, we’re all busy, but tackle that by giving your time to someone else. Whilst it may at first sound paradoxical, find an organisation or person and give some of your time to them. Even if it’s just half an hour over the course of a working week, that only equates to just over 1% of your working time - but it’s time which could make a real difference, not simply to the other person or organisation, but to you too. The key of course is not charging for it or expecting something in return. Just give them your time as a gift.

**GIVE HELP**

Think of a problem or challenge which you’re currently facing and, rather than focusing on what you need to solve it, find a business or organisation with a similar problem or challenge and help them first. Write down at least 20 ways in which you might possibly be able to help them and then go and do it. When you help others in this way, it’s likely to help you too.

**GIVE BELIEF**

Find someone who is lacking in confidence or self-belief and do what you can to support and encourage them. Spend some time with them to understand where their issue lies and help them consider ways in which they may improve their situation. Ask them, ‘if you already knew you would be successful, how would that change your approach?’ Instill belief in them and it will be repaid multiple times over.

**GIVE IDEAS**

If you see people who are short on creative ideas, then give them away. Give others creative ways to increase business, find a new stimulating career or improve a particular outcome. Ideas aren’t a zero-sum game – in fact the next one is only a new thought away. **So give your ideas away and others will flood right back to you.**

Help, belief and ideas aren’t zero-sum utilities. Even time, which is finite, is a resource which if employed well, can scale and create abundance.

The traditional approach in these instances would be to say that if you want more sales, greater performance or improved output then use your time more effectively, take from other people, focus on improving your own confidence and self-belief, and keep your ideas to yourself.

But the issue with this approach is that it assumes that the sum of the parts equals the whole. Whereas if you can find ways to involve others, to give abundantly and approach more situations as non-zero-sum games, then the sum of the parts will be greater than the whole.

Over the last two years, I’ve written over 100 articles on sales and personal development. And in this new e-book – which brings together a collection of the most popular sales articles, along with some new thoughts and ideas - I’m hoping that you’ll take some time out to consider how the ideas contained within it may provoke thought – how they could help you in your role and promote your own self-belief that in thinking and acting abundantly, you can play out your own version of a non-zero sum game.
The better part of a decade ago, I’d just taken on a new sales territory with a new company. It was in a market place I didn’t know with a product I knew nothing about and customers I’d not yet met. In other words, I was starting from scratch with no real idea of how to begin or to where to go.

That particular morning I’d picked up the keys to my hire car and headed to meet my new boss to discuss the company and the territory.

We sat for a couple of hours discussing the intricacies of the business and I left that meeting with three things. Firstly, a product catalogue with lots of numbers and descriptions and prices which meant almost nothing. Secondly, a crumpled piece of paper from a spiraled notebook with a list of my new accounts on. And thirdly a feeling of, ‘where do I even start?’

I’d taken this role because I wanted something new – something that would be an exciting challenge – and had left behind a job which I knew how to do, in a company in which I was well-known, and with lots of opportunity in front of me.

It didn’t start well.

That first year was a disaster as measured by pretty much every metric. At a time when we were expected to grow at 10%, I finished the year negative 10%, got kicked out of accounts, struggled to see existing customers, lost legacy business, couldn’t recruit to any events, and ended up in the bottom handful of sales people in the company.

On sales performance alone I should have been fired.

However, fast-forward 12 months and my territory had grown by 23%, I was being invited back to accounts that were previously lost and was being proactively called by customers offering me business. In addition to recruiting for events, I was planning and running my own events and ended the year.
as one of the top handful of sales people in the company.
The third 12 months followed the same pattern.
What had changed over that first year to impact performance so significantly in subsequent years’?
Well of course I knew more about the company, the product and the customers. But those weren’t the things which made the difference.
The difference came after learning the following four lessons.

And then doing something about it.

**Results will always lag activity**

Regardless of the length of the sales cycle, there’s a lagging effect between energy (activity) and results. In some businesses where there are higher switching costs or higher value purchases and the cycle is longer, then the lag can be greater; conversely in an industry where purchases are of lower value or there are lower switching costs, the lag can be shorter. Regardless though, there is a delay between the activity and the net result.
Whilst it may be obvious that this exists when starting out – the reason why sales people are often given a period of grace or why new start-ups should have a cash reserve – the same is true during times when results are good and growth is on the up.

At these times, it’s often the case that the individual’s activity can drop – either because they’re seeing the positive results and thinking they’ve made it, or due to some seasonality – yet results continue to increase. It’s only when there is a noticeable decline in performance or results that there is the incentive to accelerate activity again by which point there’s a large delta and prolonged lag before results can follow and pick up again.

So the key here is knowing that there is a lag in the first place and being willing to allow for that period initially, but also ensuring that activity is maintained at a steady constant in order to realise continuity in performance.

Note also that current results are therefore not an accurate predictor of future performance.

However, activity is.

Frequency is the multiplier to increasing results.

In the equation below, $F$ equals Frequency, $Q$ equals Quality and $D$ equals Direction. In other words, results are a combination of Quality of activity and Direction of activity multiplied by the Frequency of that activity.

\[ f(Q \times D) = R \]

Put another way, you can do great stuff with the right people – but if you don’t do enough of it then results will never be what they could.

Although a rudimentary measure, it’s why call-rate and productivity metrics are so commonly used to assess performance.

It’s important though to not fall into the trap of neglecting the Quality and Directional elements of the equation. After all you can be the most productive person going, but doing stack-loads of the wrong stuff with the wrong people will lead to poor levels of motivation and equally poor results.

Results follow as a consequence of doing the right stuff, in the right way, with the right people.

This speaks to the Quality element of the equation above and breaks it down even further.
Do the right stuff in the right way but at the wrong time in your business relationship and it’s not going to succeed. Similarly, doing the right stuff at the right time but in the wrong way will lead to poor results. And of course, if you choose the wrong activity, then no matter how good your execution or timing, things aren’t going to work out too well.

**Sustainable results follow as a consequence of balancing short and long-term activity**

Put another way, there’s a real need to balance activity which will pay-off in the short-run versus activity which will pay-off in the long-run.

By definition, long-term activity is often more time-consuming, costly and protracted, but on the flip side, is likely to deliver greater or more sustainable results. Short-term activity, on the other hand, delivers more instant gratification but is unlikely to scale or create sustainable growth.

However, both for sales people and small business owners there needs to be a mix of the two – and a mix of Frequency, Quality and Direction – enough of the right stuff, in the right way, at the right time, with the right people.

Understanding and applying these four principles made all the difference when running a sales territory and provided a method to categorise and manage activity.

For ultimately it’s activity which drives results and why getting that balance of activity right is the only way to turnaround a failing business or sales territory.

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**KEY POINTS:**

- Results lag activity
- Whilst productivity or frequency is only one of three measures in activity (the others are quality and direction) it is the multiplier
- Results follow as a consequence of doing the right stuff, in the right way, with the right people
- Balance activity which yields both short and long-term results
One day, a stranger walked into the general store of a small village. He’d just moved into a house close by and had called in for a few groceries. He picked up some bread, milk and a jar of coffee and made his way over to the checkout where the owner greeted him.

‘Just moved in?’ asked the owner.

‘Yes,’ replied the stranger. ‘Just a short walk around the corner from here.’

‘Oh great,’ said the owner. ‘Well, let me be the first to welcome you to the village.’ And with that he shook the stranger’s hand.

‘Thanks,’ said the stranger, as he shook hands with the owner. ‘So tell me,’ he continued, ‘what are the people like in the village?’

‘Well… what were they like in the place you just moved from?’ replied the owner.

‘Oh, they were fantastic!’ said the man enthusiastically, ‘Friendly, upbeat and generous. It was difficult to leave!’

‘I know what you mean,’ the owner nodded, ‘I think that’s pretty much what you’ll find here too.’

A few days later, another stranger walked into the same store and, like the first, he picked up a few essentials and walked over to the checkout.

As the owner began serving, he turned to the stranger and asked, ‘New to the village?’

‘Yes,’ the stranger mumbled, ‘we’ve just moved in.’

And so, in keeping with his approach, the owner extended his hand, smiled, and said, ‘Well, let me be the first person to welcome you to the village.’

The stranger took his hand reluctantly, frowned, quickly looked down and asked, ‘So, what are the people like in this village?’

‘Well, what were they like where you lived before?’ the owner again enquired.

‘Not great,’ the stranger stammered. ‘They

"We cannot choose whether to engage with the world, only how to.
- Stephen Batchelor"
were cold, aloof and selfish. To be honest, we were pleased to get out of there’.

‘I know what you mean,’ replied the owner; ‘I’m afraid that’s probably what you’ll find here too.’

**We get what we expect.**

If we expect cold, aloof and selfish, the chances are that we’ll get cold, aloof and selfish. If on the other hand we expect warm, upbeat and generous, then we’re more likely to get warm, upbeat and generous.

But don’t be fooled.

This isn’t about seeing the world through rose-tinted glasses, or not saddling up for the difficult conversation, and it’s not about avoiding the challenge or pulling someone up when they’ve stepped out of line.

It’s just that in business today we all have choices; often multiple choices for any product, service, person or organisation that we work with. And as our choices increase, so our tolerance (or willingness to accept) decreases. As such, our tolerance for average customer service, poor quality products or bad attitudes declines.

Or look at it another way, as our tolerance to these things decreases, then the likelihood of us looking for an alternative option increases.

So at a point in time when we have a plethora of options, we all have a decision to make and a question to answer:

How do you want to view your world, and how do you want to be with and do business with others?

Want to be cold, aloof and selfish? That’s ok, but the chances are that someone’s tolerance to this is decreasing and you’re forcing someone to make a choice between you and the next alternative.

Decide to be warm, upbeat and generous? Then the chances are that you’ll be the one increasing your connections and giving others a reason to work with you, your product, service or organisation.

So why should you expect good things?

**THINKING > BEHAVIOUR > RESULTS**

Because it’s your thinking that drives your behaviour, and your behaviour which will make the choice of working with you more or less attractive to someone else.

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**KEY POINTS:**

- We get what we expect
- As our choices increase, so our tolerance for the average or sub-optimal decreases
- We therefore have to give people more of a reason to work with us than the next person
- Thinking drives behaviour which determines results
Culture is everything when it comes to success in sales.

Attend any marketing or strategy class in any business school in the world and you'll hear about creating a competitive advantage. In other words, defining something that you or your company does better than anyone else which in turn gives you an edge over the rest.

The next level up from a competitive advantage – the one that we strive for – is a sustainable competitive advantage. In other words, a place where the risks of that ‘edge’ being copied, surpassed or eliminated are remote in the long-run.

So here’s the interesting thing.

If your competitive advantage is a piece of intellectual property then it could be surpassed and probably will be. Sure, it may take time, but if the ‘edge’ is in the widget then it’s only a matter of time before someone somewhere finds a way to do it quicker or better.

But take culture, and you’ve got a different proposition all together.

The culture – the focus on the people of the organisation – transmits to customers. And it’s fair to say that if the organisation is a great place to work then by default it’s likely to be a great organisation to do business with.

And that culture starts with the people at the top, the decisions they make and the actions they take. It’s all well and good for a business leader to stand beside the company poster and talk about the company values of ‘respect’ and ‘recognition’, but if the next step she takes is to shout someone down for suggesting an alternative and cancelling the free lunches in the canteen, there’s likely to be a feeling of dissonance amongst the company’s employees between the culture they’re told exists and the culture they feel exists.

As with everything, perception is reality.

Your customers aren’t number one – your people are – because if you get it right with
your people then you’ll automatically get it right with your customers. Give your people a great experience and they will in turn give your customers a great experience.

Customer experience and sales are two sides of the same coin. Create a poor customer experience and sales will suffer. Conversely, create a great customer experience and sales will respond.

But the key is to put employees first – to ensure they are happy and motivated and fulfilled in their work. Sounds simple but is that what you do? What you really do?

**So here are ten ways by which you can create a great company culture;**

1. **ALLOW PEOPLE TO PRACTICE IN A SAFE ENVIRONMENT**

Imagine a professional sportsperson turning up for their game on a Saturday and saying to the coach, ‘I’ve not trained this week, I’ve not had a chance to go over the drills, but don’t worry, I’m ready to go – just let me at them’.

The notion that this would be accepted is absurd, yet in business and in sales, this is what happens all the time.

Take a new start, give them the car keys, the product catalogue and their list of customers and send them out. Promote someone to sales manager, give them a new job description and a pay rise and tell them to get started. Launch a new product, or develop a new sales approach and send out the promotional material and ask them to get to it. Ask someone to talk to more senior members of the customer base, to have a more detailed commercial discussion and just sit back and wait for the results.

We do it all the time in a variety of scenarios. And it isn’t because we’re deliberately trying to encourage mediocrity or failure, but because we’ve created a mindset that there’s something wrong with practicing for the role, the scenario, the new product launch or the difficult conversation and that practicing is something you did when you first started out.
But consider any of the above and the improvement you see from the first time you deal with that scenario compared to the third, fourth, tenth or one-hundredth time. It’s so obvious it’s alarming.

Allowing people to practice for their role is imperative in creating a high-performing culture. It provides the opportunity for individuals to make mistakes in a safe training environment, with colleagues and trainers, rather than out there with customers, and leads to increased and more consistent performance.

2. PROVIDE OPPORTUNITY FOR GROWTH

This doesn’t just mean vertical development. It can be cross-functional or horizontal development. This not only produces rounded leaders but also offers aspiration - something for people to strive for.

If open positions are only filled externally, where is the motivation in the long-run for the incumbent employees? For while not everyone will want to or be able to move roles, the greater the culture of development then the greater the likelihood of growth.

So encourage the development and growth of people in whatever form that takes.

3. GIVE PEOPLE RESPONSIBILITY

Empower people and allow them the chance to take responsibility, because people have to take responsibility for changing the status quo – but they have to be given the opportunity to do so feeling encouraged and supported.

And that will only happen if there is the environment in which to do so. It’s all well and good to ask people to ‘go and take responsibility’ but as with everything they have to feel supported in doing so. In addition, they need to know that there’s no undertone of anticipated recrimination if things don’t go well, and they need to understand that empowerment is the accepted norm.

4. LIVE YOUR COMPANY VALUES

Nothing is worse than seeing someone – anyone – trot out a set of company values without even the slightest hint that they believe in them, that they’re willing to live by them and act congruently with them.

What brings a set of company values to life is seeing employees at every level of the organisation living them out and being recognised for doing so. Because the values are the life-blood of the company and it’s what drives the culture.

If you understand what the company values mean to you and can articulate that link, then there’s a greater likelihood that they will be lived out and replicated amongst others.

5. BE OPENED MINDED AND FORGET FEAR

A poor customer experience is one driven by employees who aren’t empowered to take ownership and make decisions.

In the end, they don’t think for themselves and default to a place of ‘computer says no’.

But in order to encourage a ‘yes’ mindset or one which produces a great customer experience, two things need to happen.

Firstly, failure in the pursuit of trying to do the right thing for the customer should be encouraged.

Secondly, failure in the pursuit of trying to do the right thing for the business should be encouraged.

It’s only in allowing that freedom of thinking and action that both creative development and empowerment will be encouraged and increased.
6. MAKE IT FUN

If you make the company a great place to work, then the chances are it will be a great company to buy from. Many of us spend more time with the people we work with than family and friends. So it figures that if you create a fun environment – where people laugh, can be open and enjoy the experience – then people are more likely to find it a great place to be.

Richard Branson said, ‘At Virgin, we have always believed that if you have fun and do good things then success will come.’

Give people the opportunity to build stronger relationships both in and out of work, liven up the workspace, create some out of work excursions, take breaks or play games.

7. BRING IN THE BEST (FIT) AND OVER-EMPHASISE THE ONBOARDING PROCESS

You can go and hire the best person out there in terms of skill or technical ability, but if they’re a bad cultural fit or have values misaligned with the organisation, then you’re in trouble. Far more important is hiring for best fit.

Recruitment, as with training, is a not a process, but an event. And nothing damages people quite so much as a poor induction to the company. At a time when there can be understandable uncertainty, now is not the time to get the basics wrong.

So after hiring for fit, the onboarding process should be done early, it should be done thoroughly and it should be staged over the first twelve months to ensure greater chances of successful integration.

8. KEEP YOUR BEST PEOPLE. PRAISE THEM AND RECOGNISE THEM

It sounds obvious but you need to keep your best people. Too many good people leave organisations, rarely because of the product or service or business, but because of the way they feel.
And whilst this is a broad area and could touch many points, often this is down to praise and recognition - or a lack thereof.

The key is to praise and recognise sincerely, frequently and using a range of approaches in keeping with the motivational drivers of the individual.

9. OVER COMMUNICATE

In many employee engagement studies, across many different organisations, one of the top three reasons for disengagement in the organisations is lack of role clarity. And it’s always right up there with a lack of communication.

The long story short:

There can never be enough communication. If you think you’re doing enough, you’re wrong. You can do more. And it shouldn’t just be one way - top down. It should be two- ways, vertically and horizontally. It should include forums and feedback, face-to-face meetings, seminars, educational events, social media, webinars, newsletters - the list is endless.

Importantly, any communication should be open, regular and timely.

10. COACH PEOPLE

The idea that coaching is for professional sportspeople only is passé. The reality is that any professional who wants to improve should have access to a coach. And that coaching could be either internal or external to the organisation and could be through formal or informal conversations.

As coaching focusses on increasing awareness to different options and then allowing the individual to take responsibility for the decision making and implementation process, coaching therefore not only leads to improved performance but greater accountability and empowerment.

Foster a culture of coaching within your organisation and you will improve creative thinking, decision making and empowerment.

A GREAT PLACE TO WORK?

If you can figure out how to create a culture where people enjoy what they’re doing and enjoy where they’re working, everything else will be easier. If you can create an environment where the people who drive the organisation don’t struggle into work in the morning but are delighted to arrive, then sales performance will undoubtedly improve.

After all, if the organisation is a great place to work in then by default it’s likely to be a great organisation to do business with.

KEY POINTS:

- Culture offers the opportunity to create a sustainable competitive advantage
- Customers aren’t number one - the employees are
- Ensure behaviour is congruent with values
- If an organisation is a great place to work then it’s likely to be a great organisation to work with
Fifteen years ago, Nokia was the dominant manufacturer of mobile phones and four in ten of us had one. We were swapping fascias, playing ‘Snake’ and anticipating the next iteration of the handset – which you could guarantee would be smaller than the last one. We knew the model numbers off by heart and in 1998, the Nokia 8210 was the smallest and lightest phone on the market.

Unfortunately smaller, lighter and more colourful was only relevant for so long.

In 2007 when the first wave of Smartphones came to market, Nokia’s market share was a huge 49.4%. However in subsequent years this fell to 43.7%, then 41.1% and then 34.2%. In the first half of 2014, it was a measly 3%.

You may have your own thoughts on why Nokia failed to maintain its market position. But let me provide a perspective on this which is widely applicable to business in general and which is to a large extent determined by the mind-set in which you approach the challenge of competition.

When you look at your competition, either personally or professionally, as a company, product or service, it’s easy to get focussed on one question. It’s easy to invest your time, energy and money, to spend hour after hour, giving it as much thought and attention as possible.

And the usual question is this:

How do we beat them?

Unfortunately though, to answer this question is to focus on the wrong area. Because the more relevant question is:

How can we create more significance than we do today?

If you focus on how you’re going to beat the next person, team, product or company, you’re focusing on how to go ‘one better’.

How do you make a smaller, lighter more colourful mobile phone?

Easy of course.
You make a smaller, lighter, more colourful mobile phone.

Except that’s not what people want any more and trying to beat the competition this way creates a narrow view of the world.

Because what the others realised, and which led to the advent of Smartphones, was that actually people wanted to have their lives in their pockets and in the palms of their hands. They wanted to be able to listen to music and watch TV. They wanted to carry their photos around and organise their diary. They wanted to be able to book a hotel or a train or a flight – and then access the booking confirmation or ticket or boarding pass directly. They wanted to know what the weather was like in New York and be able to ask their phone, ‘where is the nearest McDonalds?’

Of course when it came to Smartphones and ultimately Apple and Samsung beating Nokia, those things didn’t all happen instantly, they evolved. But they evolved as a result of trying to create more value for consumers rather than focussing on how to beat the competition. It just so happens that in giving massive value, in creating more significance, they beat the competition hands-down.

So whatever your business or whatever your role, don’t get stuck in the cycle of thinking ‘how do I beat them?’ Instead, look for ways to create more value for people. Ask yourself, ‘what can we start to do, or do more of, which people would find so valuable that they wouldn’t dream of looking anywhere else?’

How you add value and become significant is determined by your contribution to people, and the following are three areas through which you can focus on adding value by augmenting what you do today.

Think about who complements your offer.

Business is a contact sport, and ultimately it will be the number of quality relationships you have that will determine your level of success. Ironically the best way to ensure longer-term success is to find ways to help other people. Only recently did Nokia establish a relationship with Microsoft (which has since led to Microsoft acquiring Nokia’s mobile phone business unit) but arguably that was long over-due. Had they partnered with a software provider earlier, then perhaps they would have kept ahead of the market.

By creating new networks and strengthening the ones you have, you enhance your position.
Who could you partner with to offer something complementary to your customers?

Think about what complements your offer. Don’t allow your thinking to become narrowed or one-dimensional to the extent that you can’t see what the other options are. Take the Nokia example. They focussed on the hardware, the handset, which was the core of their business – make it smaller, lighter, more colourful. But whilst they were working on the handset, others were engaged in complementary thinking; finding what else they could offer which would make the handset more a vehicle to deliver value rather than the primary driver of it. In other words, they understood that it was the operating system which could create the greatest value and not the plastic box.

In finding complementary products or services you create the opportunity to deliver greater value.

What could you offer to your customers which complements what you already do today?

Think about where you could go tomorrow that would complement your offer...

We’ve all heard the saying, ‘make hay whilst the sun shines’. But the sun may not shine tomorrow and so you need to be making provision for that time. Just because things are going well today, doesn’t guarantee they will tomorrow. Could Nokia have created a music download platform? Probably. And had they done that, they would have created not only a new stand-alone business unit, but a stream of potential new customers to their existing business.

In accessing a complementary channel you create greater value and increase your potential customer base.

Where else could you go to create value to a new customer group which could complement your existing offer?

When Nokia created a colour version of ‘Snake’ it didn’t give them the edge – no one really cared. When their phones became so small you couldn’t type each key independently without hitting the one next to it, they just became annoying. So the key in all of this of course is to know what matters to the people around you and make that your focus.

And that’s the tough part.

A large part of playing a non-zero sum game, is to create value for others and to become significant. And it’s far more difficult to access those areas if all you’re focused on is beating the competition, because the mind set that’s associated with that approach is closed and narrow, rather than being open and looking for new opportunities to add value and significance.

KEY POINTS:

- Rather than focusing on the competition, concentrate on how to create greater significance for customers
- Develop networks with complementary product or service providers
- Explore ways to create complementary product or service offerings
There was a time when I thought that the only route to creating an impact was through increasing credibility. And at that time, credibility for me meant developing my knowledge through some form of accreditation or external recognition. Hold up the option of a course and I was there. Yes, in part for the opportunity to learn and develop, but also undoubtedly because I felt it would lead to increased credibility.

My simple formula was this:

**Credibility = Impact**

Looking around I don’t think I was the only one who thought that way. After all, it’s what we’re asked to do; it’s what we’re encouraged to do; and actually it’s often seen as a measure of success.

**Credibility isn’t one dimensional**

My mistake wasn’t in thinking that credibility can’t create impact - it can. It’s just that firstly, credibility isn’t one dimensional; and secondly, it’s only half of the equation. There is another factor which is equally important - but more on that in a moment.

Credibility is a combination of experience and expertise - experience being the practical contact with, or observation of, facts or events; and expertise being skillfulness, prowess or knowledge within a particular field. Finally and in addition to these two elements, credibility is linked to integrity; or to put it another way, doing what you say you will.

Therefore if you want to raise your credibility there are broadly three ways to do so:

1. **GAIN THE EXPERIENCE AND DEMONSTRATE RESULTS**

If people can see that you have achieved in a particular area and have demonstrated success, then this can lead to increased credibility. It’s also worth noting that the experience doesn’t have to be in the exact same area you wish to demonstrate credibility in - it can be in a related field. What’s important is being able to point to a ‘cycle of success’ - a period of time where you can take ownership of the results and show that it wasn’t a one-off, or a consequence of being in the right place at the right time.

**People are looking for a connection. Tell a good enough story about your brand and people will not only get invested, they’ll want to buy from you.**

- John Michael Morgan
2. BECOME AN EXPERT

Tim Ferris suggests in his New York Times Bestseller, The Four Hour Work Week, that becoming an expert is easier than you may imagine. His assertion is based on concentrating effort within a particular niche and he provides six steps to achieve expert status. They are to:

- Join two or three related trade organisations
- Read the three top-selling books on your topic
- Give one free seminar at the closest well-known university
- Give two free seminars at branches of well-known big companies
- Offer to write one or two articles for trade magazines

Regardless of whether you agree with his approach or whether you prefer a more ‘conventional’ route to expert status gained over time through increasing knowledge, the key is to take an interest in something; and then use that interest to fuel your desire to learn more and increase your exposure.

3. DO WHAT YOU SAY YOU WILL

If you want to stand out from the crowd, then a simple way to do so is to do what you say you will. And the great thing about this element of credibility is that it’s firmly in your control. Sure, it requires self-discipline and the ability to not over-commit. But that’s about it.

However, whilst credibility is important — no one wants poor experience, low knowledge or skill, or a lack of action — it’s not the full story. There is another part to the equation, which is also the catalyst — the thing which can take any credibility gained and amplify the potential impact. And that part is Connection.
THE POWER OF CONNECTION

Connection can be between you and another - your team, your friends, you followers, your customers or your suppliers - and it can also be that which you create between others – between individuals or groups.

Connection comes from generosity - from giving something without expectation. Because when you give generously, you create a connection and you cause an effect. It could be a change in mindset or a change in behaviour, but when people notice that change has occurred, they feel an impact.

It could be a connection based on generosity of time, money, energy or knowledge. It could be through giving resources, an idea, or a favour. But ultimately it is that generosity - in giving to someone else - that makes a difference.

There’s no script in here or to-do list. What you do in order to be generous and generate a connection with one person may not be what you do with the next. Similarly, what resonates with one person may not resonate with the next.

Even so, the rule is a simple one. Give more than you have to give and you’ll receive more than you need.

And it’s that generosity of spirit which creates a connection. From living out a non-zero sum game.

What’s the point?

The formula should read: Credibility + Connection = Impact

Credibility is essential for success. Without it, you’re lost. Credibility tells everyone around you what they can expect from you, and it becomes enmeshed with your reputation and so is a determinant of success.

And fortunately for the most part, it’s something which is within your control. Want to gain more experience? Go and get it. Want to develop expertise? Go and learn it. Want to show people they can trust you? Do what you say you will.

However, it’s easy to think that it’s just credibility that will be rewarded. But it’s not. We’re rewarded for being generous and for connecting with people. If you can connect with someone and make a difference, people will want to spend time with you - to interact and to engage.

And it’s that combination of credibility and connection which can really make the biggest impact.

KEY POINTS:

- Understand that Credibility + Connection = Impact
- Gain experience, become an expert and do what you say you will
- Develop connection through generosity and abundance
Ask my wife Andrea about her first summer during university and she’ll tell you of her experience, working in a fish factory. Whilst many of the other kids were heading home for heady summer days lounging around or going travelling for three months, Andrea decided to head to the local fish factory to work for eight hours a day.

Her task?

Placing a piece of paper in the bottom of each polystyrene tray which passed by her.

That was her job. Honestly. Stand at the conveyor belt, take a piece of paper, put it in the bottom of the tray, do the next one, and the next one and the next one. From 9 in the morning until 5 in the afternoon. Tray, after tray, after tray.

Andrea wasn’t the only student to start work at the factory that summer, but she was the only one to finish. Of all the students who turned up looking to earn money, she was the only one who saw it through to the end as all of the others abandoned it along the way.

Everyone had their part to play in the factory: from the person who placed the tray on the belt, to the one who counted out the prawns; from the person who placed the paper in the bottom of the tray, to the one who actually put the prawns in the tray; from the person who covered the tray with cellophane, to the one who placed the label on and finally, the person who put them in the box.

Yep, pretty remarkable stuff. And one thing’s for sure – there was no uncertainty about roles and responsibilities. Everyone was crystal clear about what the next person did and moreover, each of them was interchangeable within the team. They could move around and do each other’s jobs at a moment’s notice.

Yet this monotony didn’t stifle the sense of team, and on her last day, all of the people she’d worked with over the last three months clubbed together to buy her some chocolates to say ‘thank you’ for her contribution to the team.

My summers, and many of my friends’, were spent working in McDonald’s. Comparatively, we had it easy as there was relatively more variety in the tasks. We got to stand over the grill and the toaster and the dressing station, making Big Macs and Cheeseburgers and Quarter Pounders – eating a fair few along the way.

“If we built factories as badly as we build marketing campaigns, this country would be a shambles.”

- Seth Godin
way as well!

What is truly amazing about McDonalds is the number of processes that are employed. There’s a process for everything. There’s one for opening the restaurant in the morning, one for cooking the meat, toasting the buns, dressing the buns, frying the chicken or the fish or the fries. There’s a process for cleaning the equipment and utensils, a process for training, one for closing the store at night - there’s even a process to monitor the processes! There really is nothing quite like it.

But these processes are essential. It’s why they can staff their stores with all manner of experience of people and why the customer experience you get in one is the same as that which you get in the next. And the manner in which they train, measure and assess is extremely rigorous because consistency, reliability and success all hinge on these processes.

So what can we learn from these factories?

THE POWER OF PROCESS IN SCALING
If you want to scale a business so that it performs reliably as it grows and with less manual input, then well governed and compliant processes are critical. The world is littered with examples of managers and owners still too involved in day-to-day activity which is, in part, due to a lack of documented process. In addition, having sound and compliant processes in place will increase the value of any business due to the associated ability to scale.

THE POWER OF ROLE CLARITY
Look at many employee engagement surveys and one of the top three issues is likely to be role clarity – or lack of it. It’s one of the biggest drivers of dissatisfaction out there. In the main, people like to have boundaries. They like to know where my role starts and where yours ends. And whilst it can’t always be black and white and whilst there will always be a certain amount of ambiguity, the greater the role clarity, the greater the employee satisfaction.

THE POWER OF PERSISTENCE
Some jobs are tough. Some are a hell of a lot tougher than others. But regardless of...
the role, recruiting for persistence is key. Put it another way, when the task is to place a piece of paper in the bottom of a tray, then the recruitment and training cost is minimal. When the task is to learn how to place an intra-aortic balloon and to teach the cardiologist how to do so, then the recruitment and training costs increase exponentially. However, find someone who’s willing to tough out the former and it’s a decent indicator that they’ll not leave the latter due to lack of drive or determination.

THE POWER OF FOCUS AND PRACTICE
When a skill can become an unconscious competence - when it’s done right every time without thinking through each step, then the individual can enter a state of flow where performance is optimised. This ability comes through focus and practice. So what may be monotony for one person may be critical practice and finessing for the next.

THE POWER OF DEVELOPMENT
More sales people should spend time as marketers. More marketers as sales people. I’ll keep going and say that those who are inclined to do so and are in Ops, IT, R&D, HR or Finance should be looking at sales and marketing roles – and vice versa. Much like changing roles around the conveyor belt, our organisations would be far richer places and our leaders far more rounded if there was more cross-functional development.

THE POWER OF CULTURE
The people in the team aren’t defined by the job they do: more, their jobs and the organisation will be defined by them. And so culture is key. In many ways, get that right and nothing else matters. Foster a culture of team and success will follow.

THE POWER OF CREATIVITY
Finally, and regardless of role or work environment, everyone still has the opportunity to make a difference; to find a new way of doing things or a better way of doing things. A way that could save time or money or be the next big thing for their organisation. Just as Jim Delligatti did when he created the ‘Aristocrat’ as a way to increase sales in his burger restaurants, which later went on to be known as the ‘Big Mac’.

Both the metaphorical and literal factories have come in for some tough press in recent years as the new economy teaches us that success in the information age is not one built on the old factory mindset. New ideas, fresh thinking, creativity, and generosity are needed like never before, but that these can then be formulated into processes that can be scaled appropriately to ensure that businesses are both creative and scalable.

And that’s fair and true and relevant when it comes to attitude and mindset, both of people owning and running businesses and those working in them. Growth can’t come from minimum wage, minimum ability and minimum opportunity.

But the factory still provides some really important lessons and critical success factors for business which, if adhered to, can allow growth and development and success – and are the reasons why everyone should work in a fish factory at some point.

KEY POINTS:
• Although the mindset of monotony and division of labour has a limited place in the modern economy, there are still multiple lessons which can be garnered from our factories
• Encourage scale, role clarity, persistence, focus, development, culture and creativity
• Growth - financially, personally and professionally - comes from abundance
It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly...

Why don’t we dare greatly?

All too often we don’t dare and, as a result, there are too many people with a lot to give whose ideas and creativity never get to see the light of day. They’re kept locked away in the recesses of their mind until the time is right, when the time is perfect.

As much as they may long for that ideal moment, there will never be a perfect time.

There are a many reasons why we stall and don’t dare, but many of them are based on myths. Whilst each of them may feel real in the moment, most of them lack substance and are as a consequence of playing a zero-sum game. That I can only win if you loose. And vice versa.

But the idea of a zero-sum game is dated. It’s gone. It’s reserved for those who see only themselves and neglect to consider the impact that involving others can have on their future successes.

You can do any of the things you’ve considered but not yet started. The only choice is whether you really want to. Once you’ve made the decision and committed, the rest will start to fall into place. You have no idea what you could create – your best piece of work yet could be just over that cliff, if only you’re brave enough to dare greatly.

If only you’re brave enough to play a non-zero sum game.
Michael Smith graduated from the University of Leeds after completing a BSc in Medical Biochemistry. After taking up a sales role in a medical device company, he quickly established a successful career in the industry, which saw him appointed to numerous sales and marketing management roles across three multinational companies, most recently as Director of Sales for Europe.

In 2010, Michael was awarded an MBA with distinction from the University of Warwick where his final dissertation focused on strategies for market entry. In 2012, Michael completed his Professional Certificate in Coaching at Henley Business School.

In 2013 Michael created GO NAKED® – a series of training, coaching and development programmes based on seven principles of success which can help individuals and businesses to increased performance. He is now group Director at Developed Edge, who specialise in sale and leadership training for the Healthcare industry.

You can also read his weekly blog at www.gonakedselling.com
PLAYING THE GAME.

CREATING GREATER ABUNDANCE AND ACCELERATED GROWTH

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