

59 Business Management Lessons

for your first 7 years in business

Mastering your personal and entrepreneurial outlook:
A handbook for young CEOs and founders

From the author of: A Becomer's Philosophy

Tim Mwangi

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DEDICATION

With special thanks to the Almighty God for allowing me into the vision and inspiration of this book.

This book is dedicated to all of you with love.

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FOREWORD

In the wake of the unprecedented turbulence and rapidly changing business environment experienced by modern-day businesses, many people have had to go into businesses they never anticipated, or have had to figure out how to remain afloat, creating an adequate need to learn the ins and outs of strategic business management. This book is just the right antidote for that situation. Here is a guide to developing successful businesses, developed from my experience studying and working as a strategy and management consultant with hundreds of firms and individuals across the board. The is recommended for people who are either just about to start out, recently started out in business, or are in business and experiencing stagnation, as a guide on how best to go about common business management challenges, more so with one of the worst global health pandemics of the 21st century in the equation, and more turbulence expected in coming years. I believe that it will turn lives around and inspire great successful brands and lives.

INTRODUCTION

You have always wanted to start your own brand, but some fear keeps you from doing so right? Or well, you actually did overcome the fear, but still got stuck, okay, so what next? Well, who is Corona, it finally pushed you out there. Mine is a gift to help you reach the vision you have for your brand. So in this book are some of the secrets you may need to know to take your brand from non-existent, or barely existent to your envisioned level of success. Hopefully you will learn something that will also impact your personal life as well, and pass on the same knowledge to other generations.

When starting a business, there is a lot of pressure to fast-track the registration process. Oftentimes, as entrepreneurs we get tempted to settle on things we haven't quite thought through, because we assume that once we get the certifications, and are ready for work, we will magically change everything to match our expectations. However, this is not always the case. Once you register, and you begin to get your brand out there, it is quite hard to change. This is because there are bigger problems to deal with, and also because such changes may make a start-up look unsure of itself, not to mention that such changes require money and time to implement.

As such, it is important to make decisions after having thought through thoroughly, to ensure that should going back be difficult, the prevailing decisions could still drive your brand forward. In here are tens of lessons you need to learn before your brand gets to 7 years, and most of them apply even later. Most of these are lessons I have learned the hard way with the 10 startup brands I have begun or been affiliated to, some of which have seen the light

of day, and some which have failed. Others are lessons I have learned from tens of projects and case studies from companies that I have helped to troubleshoot in the course of my career as a strategy and management consultant.

I welcome you to usurp of this wisdom, to make yours a safer, easier and well-advised journey in creating your own brand, I really hope and pray that this book helps you achieve your life goals, in one way or another, and please be sure to write to me and let me know what was most helpful to you. Just to bring to your attention, this is not exactly new information from out of this world, it's probably things you have heard many times, but definitely not from me, and not in this context.

PART 1

Before you start your business...

1. Find your purpose in life first

You have no business running a business if you don't know what your purpose in life is. Period. Before you even go out to start a business, you need to know who you are in the first place. Being an entrepreneur, understanding yourself will make it way much easier to know what you want to do. The first question you should seek to answer is, what is my purpose in life, my calling, my natural unique gift? There are many things that one can do in today's world, but not everyone is gifted/called to do anything. Each vocation is best pursued by those who are gifted and purposed for such vocations. There is a reason why we are made different with different passions and abilities, and we cannot be everything. Many of us have the academic qualifications to make us members of the coveted elite society *i.e.* doctors, lawyers, engineers just to name a few, but our callings are different, and we just cannot force ourselves into such, or rather we better not force ourselves into what we are not gifted to do.

As an entrepreneur, if you understand what your gift is,

nothing will discourage you to an extent of doubting your pursuit, but if you do not know who you are and what you are gifted to do, you will be easily discouraged, jealous and never content. Chase your purpose first and money will find you in the right field of work. If you are gifted to be a mechanic, you have no business starting a supermarket, go start a garage. If it is millions you want, you can get them outside of your purpose, but if it is success and fulfillment you want, start a business that revolves around your natural gift.

I want to call your attention to Proverbs 18:16 which reminds us to be careful to know our gifts for, *“a man's gift maketh room for him, and bringeth him before great men.”* Take time to understand what you are made of, what you are happy doing, what comes naturally to you. Instead of building a multibillion dollar company that makes you sick to imagine another new day of work is two hours away, you would rather build a local family business that you are eager to report to every morning. But hey, listen, if your calling is to start a multibillion dollar supermarket, please don't go starting a local family business. Knowing your purpose doesn't mean having a mediocre vision in life. You will be happier doing something that is within your calling, huge or small, and will grow old loving yourself for the choice you made to pursue a line of business that is within your gift. Not only that, but also the realization of your purpose and the gift that accompanies that purpose will begin your journey to sustainable success.

That gift comes so naturally to you that you oftentimes may overlook, underestimate or take it for granted. But that gift is the one unique thing no one else can be or do like you. If you find it and do it, nature will make room for you, and you will sit with great men. Your gift(s). It could be sales, it could be leadership, whatever it is, find it, then start your business around it.

2. Get a niche you are passionate about, and able to do

In my book, *A Becomer's Philosophy*, I explored in-depth the relationship between passion and ability. If you haven't read it, I would recommend that you get that book and go through the first chapter titled *Barcode and Exposure*, and you will be in a better position to understand why I will emphasize on the importance of identifying your passions and ability, and the points where they meet. Even after knowing your purpose, there are very many things you can do that are still within that purpose. As such, you need to clearly understand what niche within that purpose you are most comfortable with. Assuming you are called to motivate people and lift up their spirits, you will realize that the field is so wide that you can easily get lost, even though you know your purpose. There are people who specialize in motivation for personal development, rehabilitation for criminals, parenting advice, counseling for drug and substance abuse, organizational growth and development, entrepreneurship advice, marriage, and academic progress among others. There are others that are so specific like motivating CEOs, counselling presidents, inspiring girls in science, motivating mothers who have undergone birth complications, counseling suicide victims and so on and so forth.

I cannot overemphasize on the importance of realizing your niche, and owning it up. When you know your niche, nothing, no amount of storms can convince you to back down, and you will always be happy about your vocation. You will know what opportunities to accept and what to reject. If you want to tutor, don't just open a school and wait to teach anything. Identify a niche that you are best in, you could teach music, and maybe even go down further into specializing in string instruments, or drums, or saxophone.

If you want to start a YouTube brand, you could start an

education platform for training dogs, or cats, or cows (if it is possible, why not?).

If you want to start an online business, you could start a cloth-line for teenagers, or dancers, or corporations or for charity.

If you want to start an NGO, you cannot fulfill everyone's needs, so specialize in food security, or water management, or plastic recycling, or road repair.

The point I am trying to put across is, don't just invest blindly, get yourself a spot you love, have the knowledge about, and can see an opportunity in. Remember once you start, there may never be a chance to go back and start again *correctly*. So, if you make a mistake from the start, it will haunt you to the third and fourth generation, should they inherit the business. Look for something you are not just passionate about, but one that you have the ability to do, and do well.

3. Define your vision

One of the biggest mistakes that we make as entrepreneurs is rushing to put our money where our mouths are not. We so easily invest in businesses where we see no future, or understand nothing about. Just because a certain investment is working well for me is no guarantee that it will work for you.

As an entrepreneur who seeks to succeed and make history, begin with the end in mind. You have to see yourself as you want to be, before others can see you as such. Before you even invest the first coin in the purpose and niche you have already identified in lesson 1 and 2 above, contemplate on your vision in the purpose and niche. What would happen if I go out without a clear vision, you would ask, and I would once again call your attention to a very clear answer, in the book of Proverbs 29:18, "*Where there is no*

vision, the people perish.” If you are called to be a teacher and would want to open a music academy, what is your end goal? What end do you already have in mind? You want to open a boutique, for what reason? What do you want to see at the end of the day? A few years ago, a good friend of mine rang me and wanted to start an organization to help raise awareness and mentor and support girls in STEM. The first question I asked her was, what is your vision? Why do you want to start the organization? What do you see at the end of the day? These were critical questions my friend had to go back and think over for a couple days, it’s actually years now. What is driving your desire to do what you want to do?

On another occasion, one of the organizations I consulted for had a problem with jump-starting operations, enduring a back and forth that didn’t actually materialize into action. So I proposed a diagnosis of the organization’s system. Come to find out, what half of the team thought was the vision was what the other half took as the mission, plunging everyone into confusion. So what exactly is a vision in the context of business management and leadership?

A vision is defined as what you see at the end of the day. When you start your business, what is the one picture you have in mind, what scenario are you trying to create? That vision is what will keep you motivated all the time, and will be most important during times of hardship. In Zimbabwe and DRC, there are stories of young men and women who enter dangerous gold, diamond and coal mines that go as deep as 40 meters and as wide as several hundred meters in a hot and dark itinerary, where the ground can easily crumble, or a venomous snake could bite and kill. Those people spend up to 3 days in the dark, scary mines, thirsty, hungry, desperate, poor and uncomfortable, just so they can secure a livelihood. If you ask me what drives these people, I will tell you it is the vision they have. The end they have in mind is the gold,

diamond or coal they will get. It doesn't matter whether there is gold or not, what matters is they believe in their vision, the gold. They believe they will reach the end and come back loaded with gold. If that vision can get someone to pursue such a dangerous path, how much more would it help to keep you and your employees on track? Let me just remind you that the worst thing other than being blind is having sight, but no vision.

4. Define your mission

After knowing what you want to achieve, the next question is how will you achieve it? The mission of a brand talks about how you will get to your vision, your goal. A mission is mostly an extension of the vision, explaining how a brand intends to achieve the picture of the end as they saw it from the beginning. I will give an analogy here that I believe we are all well versed with. When soldiers go out for battle, they have an end goal in mind, so what they go to do is to implement the plan, so as to achieve the vision. This plan is the mission. The mission is the plan that makes one achieve the vision they have in mind. Warren Buffet once said, an idiot with a plan can defeat a genius without a plan.

Similarly, when an organization is started, before there is even a mission, there has to be a clearly defined vision, after which, the proprietors will then begin to define how they will reach their vision. Mission entails a generalization of the step-by-step process through which a brand will achieve its vision. If you start a hotel with a vision of being the most culturally diverse brand in town, you could define your mission as preparing meals from at least five international or local cultures, where you feature each culture each day, all the cultures featured daily or whichever way you deem most strategic.

If you invest in real estate and intend to provide the most

affordable and decent housing for middle-income families, your mission could be to build houses that have modern sanitation, parking space, lawn, internet connectivity and security at discounted rates, by partnering with money lending institutions to give mortgages to qualified people. In this example, what you see at the end of the day is a very decent home, better than what is currently known as decent. But the way to do that is by ensuring that your housing units have all that a modern middle-income family needs to be comfortable, and that they are affordable to those families.

5. Get your business model right

Business models are the blueprint that outlines how a company creates, delivers, and captures value. The importance of a good business model cannot be overstated. It serves as the foundation for sustainable growth and profitability, with several advantages which include but are not limited to providing a clear outline of how the company will make money, ensuring a consistent stream of revenue, clearly defining the value the business provides to customers, setting it apart from competitors, attracting the target audience and guiding in the allocation of resources, ensuring they are utilized efficiently and effectively.

A good business model also helps your business in understanding customer needs, which is important because delivering value in a way that resonates with customers is fundamental to a successful business model. Additionally, it helps in enhancing a business' long-term viability and sustainability. A bad business model will kill your potential.

A good illustration of the repercussions of a good and bad business model is provided by the parable of the talents. Among the different servants who received talents in Matthew 25:14–30,

one adopted a business model where he invested the talents and they grew his potential and future fortunes when the master came back and was happy, while another adopted a bad business model where he buried the talents, stifled his potential and made the master angry upon his return. After knowing your purpose and natural unique gift, and your niche, catching the vision and mission, next is adopting the right model for delivering value to the market through our business.

There are various types of business models, each with its unique approach to generating revenue and serving customers. Some common types include:

- i. Subscription model: Customers pay a recurring fee for access to a product or service, often seen in streaming services or subscription boxes.
- ii. E-commerce model: Conducting business online, buying and selling products or services over the internet.
- iii. Freemium model: Offering a basic product or service for free and charging for premium features or enhanced functionality.
- iv. Franchise model: Allowing individuals or investors to operate under an established brand's name, following a proven business model.
- v. Marketplace model: Facilitating transactions between buyers and sellers, often taking a commission or fee for each transaction.
- vi. Brick-and-Mortar model: Traditional physical stores where customers buy products or services directly from a physical location.

Continuously reviewing and improving your business model is like fine-tuning a recipe for success. Think of it as regularly checking if the ingredients (like who your customers are, how you reach them, and how you make money) are still creating the perfect dish. This approach draws inspiration from methods like the lean startup model, encouraging small, smart changes over big, risky ones.

Imagine your business as a puzzle, where each piece (like how you connect with customers and what sets you apart) plays a crucial role. Tools like the business model canvas help put all these pieces together. It's like having a clear picture of your business on one page. By frequently looking at this 'canvas,' you ensure your business stays fresh and in sync with what people want. This ongoing process of checking, adjusting, and improving keeps your business nimble and ready for whatever the world throws its way.

6. Know your numbers (KYN)

Never go to war if you have not mastered your weapons. Numbers are your weapons in the business war. These are the tools that you will use to clear the way for you so you can keep forging forward. Numbers will tell you where there is a ditch, a steep climb, a waterfall, and even where the enemy is waylaying you. Numbers in business can be profit margins, net income, gross income, shareholders equity, debit, credit, sales, cost of goods sold (COGS), short-term or long-term liabilities, assets, demand and supply, tax, custom duty, employee turnover, break-even time *etc.*, never ignore the power of numbers. You need to keep watching your numbers, to know whether you are doing well or failing.

You could be in business, but with unhealthy numbers. Don't just smile because you are in business, smile because you know your numbers are healthy. Do your math periodically. Have staff

meetings to discuss what you can do to change a bad trend in your numbers. Focus on keeping a healthy life for your business numbers. When in business, do not ignore even a single change in your numbers, it may mean the difference between the ditch you are about to fall into, and the success you left behind. Always be sure you know what your stock price is, be sure to know how many employees you have. Have a well-done balance sheet. Ask for graphs and presentations for your numbers every soonest possible.

7. Know your partners (KYP)

For many of us, your first partner in business is either your spouse, your college or high school friend or a family member. Because of the past relationship we have had with these people, they may either tend to take the partnership as a joke, or bring past problems into work. This is a huge mistake, and an unhealthy gamble for our businesses. When you are getting a partner, ensure you are not driven by pressure to start, that you pick any available person as your partner(s). Be careful with who you choose as your business partner. A wrong business partner is a thorn in the flesh that you will have to carry along all the days of your business life. Take time to vet your different options and pick the best person.

Within a span of a week, I have had the pleasure of pestering two good friends over why they allowed their incredible businesses to die out, and they both gave me similar answers, incompatible choice of partners. Refusing to pick a close relative or friend to be your business partner because they are not compatible with your vision is not a crime. Do not compromise on your brand vision. Go for the best. Look for a person who will motivate you and challenge you. Look for someone who has the same zeal and motivation as you, if not better. Look for someone who will motivate you to go to work when you are almost giving up. Look for someone who will be your friend through good and bad days of

work, because they will surely come. Don't pick a partner so that you can have your business registered, hoping you will get a better partner later, or hoping that your current partner will change. Go for the best right from the start. Go for the person you can leave the business to, and be confident that he or she will manage it as good as you would, if not better.

Who are you picking to stay by your side when there are no profits? One of the movies I used to like watching is called *Alex Inc.*, and the reason I liked it was because it portrays a family man who quits his job and tries to start his own company at the prime of his career, throwing his entire family into turbulence. The main character Alex decides to pick his second cousin Eddie to be his partner, not because they are blood relatives, but it is because in his words, Eddie could *yang* him, that is, keep him on his toes, and for sure, Eddie does not disappoint. That is what you need in selecting a partner. You need that person who will not give you peace when you are derailing. You need a person who will not smile at you as if things are okay yet you are miles away from your path to success.

The partner you select goes a long way to show what you are made of and what to expect from you. So you need to be careful. Some of your investors and business associates will judge you based on what they make of your partner. If you have not started your business yet, as my mom often tells me, you are in the field right now, and you have all the liberty to choose whatever you want, however you want it. Don't trade your long-term success for short-term convenience or pressures, because that business partner will more or less become your biggest success or failure.

8. Get a mouth-watering brand name

Speaking of being known, a brand name can easily influence

how well a brand is known. The brand name that you select has to be as captivating as possible. A name can mean the difference between going past your first day of business and a hundred years of business. A name can be the only thing that can make your competitor more favorable in the eyes of your target market compared to your brand. There are many factors that may determine the manner in which a name is judged, and some may be out of the brand's control, locked in the market's own perception.

The other day I was chatting with a friend about the importance of color and names that a brand chooses, then she pulled a mug of yogurt from the driver's cup holder of her car, and showed me a brand of yogurt she had bought earlier. She said, 'Tim you see this, what is this now? What does this name even mean? Look, what colors are these and how do they relate to vanilla flavor? Also, now what kind of symbol have they printed? How does a butterfly on a flower relate to a vanilla flavored yogurt?' This conversation escalated to other brands such as corn flour, the packaging, color and font they use for their products, and was quite an interesting discussion. But you see, that is her own perception, for which she has a right to, now imagine a million other people sharing the same perception, while on the other half of the world, the brand's manager is out looking for loans to invest in production. Production for who, I ask?

There is no limit to the number and nature of perceptions that the market might develop towards a brand, based on its name. A name may be liked/ disliked because it reminds of something, because it is long/short, because it is funny/ serious, because it is associated with something likable/ dis-likable and so on and so forth.

The stage of name selection is a crucial stage that **MUST** be approached with a lot of caution. There are several ways through which to come up with a brand name. You can get a:

- i. Descriptive brand name - this is a name that revolves around what a company does. This name can talk about the service or goods that a brand is going to provide, or the work that the product is going to serve. An example of this is Bamburi Cement, by just reading the name, one can tell that the product is a company that deals with cement products. Another example is Frontier Marketing, whose name tells you upfront that it is a marketing firm. The options are unlimited, with pros and cons to each. It is perfectly okay to name your business based on the benefit it brings to the market, but the downside with this is that should the business decide to grow its service portfolio, there might be a problem with the relevance of the name. For example, should Bamburi Cement consider going into car manufacturing business, the name would be irrelevant *per se*.
- ii. Evocative brand name - often a single name with a lot of creativity inside, not necessarily drawn from the product(s) that the brand offers. Popular evocative brand names include Game and Amazon. The advantage with using such a brand name is that it does not tie the brand to a single specific scope of operation. It is important to note, the name does, however, exist in common language.
- iii. Abstract/ invented brand name - this is a name that is totally made up, meaning that it has no meaning other than what they are as a brand name. The beauty about this is that you can basically come up with any abracadabra as your brand name, and it will grow into a perfectly equitable brand. Examples of such brand names include Toyota, Verizon. I mean what is Toyota in English? Outside of its use as a brand name, it has no meaning at all. It is important to note, the name does not exist in

common language.

- iv. Lexical brand name - this is a name that is drawn from interlinking two names, intentionally misspelling a known name, onomatopoeia or joining words from two languages to form a brand name. Common examples include Safaricom which is a combination of a Swahili word Safari and an English word Communication, or Airtel which combines two English words, air, and a short of the name telecommunication. Facebook is made from interlinking the words face and book while Instagram links Instant and telegram.
- v. Acronym brand name - this takes either the first letters of a long word to combine into one, or otherwise, but the letters picked represent a long sentence. Common examples include AT&T, UNICEF, KENHA, AU, UN, TED Talks, USIU, POTUS, and KFC etc.
- vi. Founder brand name - this is a brand name that is based on the actual name of the founder of the business. Examples include Nelson Mandela Foundation, Oprah Winfrey Show, Procter & Gamble Company, Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Jimmy Kimmel Show or Ford Motors named after Henry Ford.
- vii. Geographical brand name - this often alludes to the place where the organization was begun, or where it is located/ operates. Example include Nairobi Bottlers, Mount Kenya Bottlers, Chelsea Group *Mozambique* (CGM), or East Africa Tenders
- viii. Mixed brand name - this is a brand name that mixes two or more of the categories above. For example Rensyl Integral, East African Bottlers Ltd talks about the

geographical location of the company as well as the benefit it brings to the market.

9. Brand colors matter, get it right

Many a men are often accused of a scathing color blindness, but there is no excuse for lacking an eye for brand colors that captivate. I don't know if you have ever walked into a hotel or a butchery feeling hungry, and then you look around, look up at the ceiling and leave even before the waiter can get to your table? Also, I don't know if you size up hotels, and your ability to pay for meals based on their theme colors. If you look at brands such as Java, Mugg & Bean and Big Square, there is something about them with brown and black colors. There is just some customer-attracting element in their choice of brand colors, isn't it?

I did not know there was a difference in the cost of hiring and buying cars based on their colors, until I once overheard a very interesting conversation that led me into research. Even in the showrooms, there is a difference in cost of purchase between white cars and chocolate, shiny black and gray cars. Leave alone that, there are even differences based on the shade of a color, you know, and this translates to perceptual stimuli which may positively or negatively affect a brand.

This goes to show you that a difference in my brand color could convince my client to buy a cup of tea at \$20, yet you are selling the same cup of tea at \$10. With this in mind, when you set out to create a brand, be open-minded in selecting a brand color(s) that will speak for you. A brand color(s) can say a lot of things, it can show your identity, your price and your vision. As a matter of fact, some of the organizations in California, are identifying themselves as LGBTQ friendly using the colors on the LGBTQ's flag. This enables them to steer clear of outrightly saying, but not

failing to say that they are LGBTQ friendly. In the food industry, green makes us think, organic and eco-friendly for the most part right?

The importance of color to a brand can well be advised by a special branch of psychology known as color psychology, a field specially dedicated to studying the relationship between color and human perception and behavior. Have you ever entered a car that has mahogany or brown finishing, what was your feeling about its ambience? Also, ever wondered why children seem more attached to toys that have brighter colors than those with dull colors? Interestingly, I went shopping with my nephews a few days ago, and unbeknownst to me, they started drifting from my budget towards the toys section. Before I knew it, the little guys were already holding either red or bright blue helicopter toys. I looked around and realized the manufacturer had already played with these little guys' minds, and put my wallet on the blink of survival in the process. Different colors work well with different age brackets, regions, social classes and genders.

Below, I will share with you some of the perceptions that go with popular colors

Red/ pink/ orange - passion and energy

Green - calming, healthy, natural

Yellow - optimism

Purple - royalty

Black/ Brown - elegance, stability, simplicity

White - cleanliness

10. Clearly define your brand architecture.

Just like a house, a brand also needs an architectural design. You need to be able to know how you want your brand to be built, whether you want a two-story brand, a basement brand, sky scrapper or bungalow brand. There are three main designs of brand architecture;

i. Monolithic/ branded house design - refers to an architectural design where one brand name is used for all products. Individual products may inherit their names from the parent brand name. An example is iPhone as a brand name, where all the products in that brand identify with the parents brand name, but are separated by a number and/or a letter, e.g., iPhone 6, iPhone 6s.

ii. Endorsed design - refers to an architectural design where individual products are associated with the parent brand through an endorsement which can be visual or verbal. For example, Mpesa is a brand of Safaricom that recently gained its independence, but is associated to Safaricom through endorsement. All Mpesa shops are painted the same color as Safaricom's theme color, and all Mpesa posters have a Safaricom logo.

iii. Freestanding/ house of brands design - refers to an architectural design where each individual product is branded as a complete standalone without any endorsement. The main parent name only acts as the glue that holds all the products together, but each individual product within the company are branded individually. For example, Kenyatta University is an academic institution, a brand of its own. The institution owns a beach hotel known as North Beach Hotel, and also owns a referral Hospital known as the Kenyatta University Teaching and Referral Hospital. These two investments are run separately, and marketed separately. As a matter of fact, these two are brands that one can hardly identify as run by the university, well unless you know. I mean

anyone can call a hospital a Kenyatta University Hospital, and either pay for that association, or claim to be using a public landmark to identify their business. We have hospitals such as Nairobi Hospital which do not imply that they belong to the county government. We have hospitals such as Karen Hospital which do not imply that they are only found in Karen.

You must be able to clearly state the type of architectural design you will adopt for your organization. You can have many different products all endorsed by the parent brand name, or have freestanding product brand names, or a monolithic system. But you need to be able to foresee and select the right design. If you fail to select from the word go, you will have a system full of confusion, with some brands looking like they are growing faster than their parent brand.

11. Source and manage your capital wisely

Navigating the entrepreneurial journey requires a clear understanding of diverse sources of startup capital and strategic discernment to identify the most suitable avenues for securing seed capital. Startup capital can emanate from various sources, each with its unique advantages and considerations. Traditional funding avenues include personal savings, family contributions, and bank loans. Exploring these sources may entail less bureaucracy but could involve personal financial risks. Venture capitalists and angel investors offer another avenue, injecting capital in exchange for equity or convertible debt. Crowdfunding platforms have emerged as a democratized means of raising capital, engaging a broader audience in supporting innovative ideas. Government grants and startup competitions also present opportunities for securing initial funding without incurring debt.

Determining where to seek seed capital involves a strategic

evaluation of the business's stage, industry dynamics, and funding requirements. For ventures with high-growth potential and scalability, engaging with venture capitalists or angel investors might be the path to pursue, aligning the business with strategic partners who bring more than just financial backing. Alternatively, businesses in industries with broad public appeal might find crowdfunding platforms an effective way to connect with a diverse investor base. Entrepreneurs seeking autonomy and control might lean towards bootstrapping, utilizing personal savings or contributions from friends and family.

Seed capital is the lifeblood that nurtures the initial growth phases of a startup. It provides the resources needed to turn visionary ideas into tangible realities, covering essential expenses such as product development, marketing, and initial operational costs. Beyond mere financial backing, the right source of seed capital can bring strategic expertise, mentorship, and networking opportunities, amplifying the startup's chances of success. In the intricate tapestry of startup capital, the ability to discern where to seek seed capital is a skill that sets the course for a business's trajectory. Each source of capital comes with its own set of implications, and aligning the choice with the unique needs and aspirations of the startup is instrumental in laying a solid foundation for future growth.

12. Have a central organizing thought (COT)

Developing a COT involves distilling a company's vision, mission, strategy, and actions into a single, compelling sentence that serves as a guiding light for internal stakeholders. This process starts by clearly defining the vision and mission of the organization. The vision should encapsulate the long-term goals and aspirations of the company, while the mission outlines the core purpose and values. Next, the strategy must be articulated,

focusing on how the company plans to achieve its mission and vision through specific actions and objectives.

Once these elements are well-defined, the challenge is to compress them into a concise and motivating statement. The COT should reflect the company's core values and strategic direction while being inspirational and easy to remember. It should provide a clear sense of purpose and direction for employees, aligning their daily activities with the broader goals of the organization.

For example, consider the company Patagonia. Its COT could be distilled into something like: "Inspire and implement solutions to the environmental crisis through innovative and sustainable practices." This phrase communicates Patagonia's commitment to environmental responsibility, innovation, and sustainable business practices, providing clear guidance to its employees about the company's overarching goals. Another example is the tech giant Adobe, which might frame its COT as: "Empower creativity through cutting-edge technology and unparalleled customer support." This sentence captures Adobe's focus on enabling creative expression, leveraging technology, and ensuring exceptional customer service.

Similarly, the multinational company Siemens could have a COT such as: "Drive innovation and improve lives through advanced technology and sustainable practices." This phrase reflects Siemens' commitment to technological advancement and sustainability, guiding its employees in their everyday tasks and decisions.

To develop an effective COT, companies should involve key stakeholders in the process to ensure that the final statement resonates across all levels of the organization. It is also essential to regularly review and update the COT to ensure it remains relevant as the company evolves. The COT should be communicated

consistently across internal channels and integrated into the company culture to reinforce its significance and impact. By clearly defining and effectively communicating the COT, companies can align their teams, drive motivation, and ensure a unified direction towards achieving their strategic goals.

13. Have a crazy imagination

You are an individual with your own capabilities and no one can be like you in this world, or the world to come. You are you, and you will remain you. There are people who will tell you what you are thinking is crazy and cannot be done. Others will tell you they tried and failed. Others will dare you to try and promise to laugh at you when you fail, but come one, how bad can it possibly get? Try stuff and think crazy. You have what it takes to rewrite what we know as success in your industry. You can achieve everything you set out to achieve, if you purpose to.

Allow no one to classify your ideas as crazy, and even if they were, what is the harm? Imagine crazily, for it is in those imaginations that great innovations are birthed. Be crazy in your thinking. Try out what looks impossible. Venture into places others have not ventured before. Refuse to be average. Add a taste of your crazy imagination to every solution. Don't just make a car, try and make one that can fly. Don't just make a road, try and make one that can charge a car on transit. Don't just make an artificial flower, make one that can be folded and be used as a mat while on the front lawn, then while on a date, your client can turn the mat into a flower in the middle of the desert. Think outside the box. Think crazy if I may say. If you do not think crazy and seek to implement those ideas, there are two likely options. No one will ever think of the same, so those will be innovations lost, or someone else will think of a similar idea and get the credit you would have received. Besides, who has a *crazyometer* that

measures what ideas are to be considered crazy and which ones are sane? Don't be afraid to think creatively. Don't allow someone's idea of you being a crazy dreamer choke your success. You could be harboring the next big innovation with your crazy idea.

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Assuming you began with the steps shared above, never ever think of quitting. Business leadership is not for the faint-hearted. It is for those who will make losses in the tune of millions and still rise up and go back to business a minute later. Entrepreneurship is addictive because it leaves you time to be you, your own boss and to directly impact on the lives of others, so if you quit, you have a long list of advantages to lose. No matter the situation, keep going, if you have to crawl, do so. There are times when taxes will be raised and your invoice slashed by half, keep going. There are times when landslides will take away half of your business premises, rebuild and move on. There will be other times when half your employees will be poached by your competitors, don't quit, hire others and mentor them to the level of productivity you need. When you feel you have reached your breaking point, rest but don't quit. There are many people out there who are being touched by what your brand is doing. If you quit, you put their lives in jeopardy. You may not know, but your brand might be the only reason some people wish to see the break of dawn. Keep moving and keep pressing on. Soldier on, don't even think of quitting, it's not an option.

PART 2

After you finally start your business...

So, hey, you have started out, but as you may have already found out, real work begins after registration. If you are as articulate in planning as I am, or this is your first business to start, you must have spent a lot of time on preparations to register, that you almost forgot that was just preparing you for what was to come. Real work begins once you get those papers. Once you are cleared by the government to carry out business within a certain jurisdiction, all hell breaks loose, and the marathon begins. Here is when you now need to be really cautious and more visionary than ever before.

As entrepreneurs, we have been tasked with the making of decisions that help our brands move from non-existent to excellent, and the real test comes soon after going past the registration barrier.

So in this section, I want us to look at some of the things to do once you are past the registration stage. You have been granted permission to do business, so what's next? Hold tight, it is about to get really educational in here.

14. Don't try, do or don't

Entrepreneurship requires a tough heart. It requires a man or woman who goes beyond the ordinary, to try out ideas they believe will work. It requires someone who will make a business move that will look foolish, but believe in that move until it materializes. Business is about going full-out to fight for what you believe will add value to you and to the society, whether or not other people believe in it. If you want to make it, you have to do it, not try it.

It has always been said business is not for the faint-hearted. You know why, because businessmen and women do not try to make smart business moves, they actually make the moves. If you are in business to try, quit, and go home. Business is about doing, not trying to do. The quickest way to fail in business is to try, and the surest way to succeed is to actually do, and not try. To do and not try requires a strong heart, and a clear-cut vision. The reason why people waste time and money trying is because they are not sure of their purpose in life, and if they do, they have no vision, and if they do, they do not have a plan, and if they do, their model to the business is faulty.

The other worst thing apart from failing is trying, instead of actually doing. When you try, you are not sure whether to invest or not to, so you make half-smart, half-dumb moves. When you know what you want, you make smart moves, because you are dedicated, and you believe in what you are doing. You cannot fully achieve your potentials as long as you have a *mpango wa kando* with failure.

When you are trying, you know very well you can fail, and so you focus half your energy, and ultimately fail. When you are trying, you are open to the possibility of failure, but when you are actually doing it, you know you have no option but to make it. When you are trying, you have an attitude of either way it is okay,

but when you are actually doing, you know either way is not okay, it is only okay if you make it. When you are trying, you also do not believe in yourself, and your vision.

If you are in business to try, think again. If you are in business to try, quit the business, or stop trying and start doing. I would rather fail after actually doing something, rather than fail after trying to do it. Why try? Wait until you have the guts to do business. Trying will only lead you to failure. Either commit to do what you have to do, whatever it costs, or don't at all; just don't make a half-baked attempt, it is worse than just doing nothing.

15. Think Blue Ocean

If you want to grow, create an organization that leads, and leads fearlessly. You can very easily create a successful brand that will lead, or create a brand that will follow the standards set by others. If your brand cannot become so good that it can lead your industry, go back and reconsider your strategy. One very effective way to create a leader brand is to think Blue Ocean.

In business strategy, the Blue Ocean Strategy, as articulated by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, is a concept every business leader ought to know. It beckons leaders to transcend the confines of competition and instead create uncontested market space, exemplifying the essence of fearless leadership. To quote the authors, "Every successful person can be a leader, but not every leader can be successful." This underscores the distinction between mere leadership and the transformative impact that successful leaders wield. Creating a brand that not only succeeds but also leads in its industry requires meticulous strategy and a commitment to innovation.

The Blue Ocean Strategy, conceived by W. Chan Kim and Renée Mauborgne, proposes a paradigm shift in business thinking.

In the "Blue Ocean," companies seek uncontested market space, creating new demand and rendering competition irrelevant. This strategic approach encourages innovation, value creation, and differentiation, fostering a unique market space where businesses can thrive without intense rivalry. In contrast, the "Red Ocean" represents traditional competitive markets saturated with players vying for the same pool of customers. This crowded space often results in fierce competition, commoditization, and a focus on incremental improvements rather than groundbreaking innovation.

To leverage the Blue Ocean Strategy effectively, businesses must identify untapped market opportunities and redefine industry boundaries. This involves exploring new value propositions, embracing innovation, and aligning offerings with unmet customer needs. By focusing on creating distinctive value, companies can break away from the constraints of competition and chart a course toward sustainable growth.

16. Sell an experience, more than the physical item

Shifting the focus from selling a physical item to marketing the experience associated with the product can significantly enhance customer appeal and drive sales. This strategy hinges on understanding the core pain points and desires of the target market and crafting messages that resonate emotionally. By emphasizing the experience rather than the product, businesses can forge a stronger connection with customers, tapping into their emotions and imaginations. This approach leverages the psychological concept of experiential marketing, which suggests that customers are more likely to make a purchase based on how a product or service will make them feel rather than its practical attributes.

A prime example of this strategy in action is Coca-Cola. The company doesn't just sell a beverage; it sells moments of

happiness and togetherness. Coca-Cola's marketing campaigns often focus on sharing joyful experiences, whether through festive ads, global events like the World Cup, or community-building initiatives. By positioning Coca-Cola as a part of celebratory moments and social gatherings, the brand taps into the emotional experience of enjoyment and connection that the drink represents.

In practical terms, businesses looking to adopt this strategy should start by identifying the emotional triggers that resonate with their target audience. This involves understanding customer desires and pain points deeply and ensuring that the experience they promise aligns with these insights. For instance, a company selling outdoor gear might focus on the adventure and freedom of exploring nature rather than just the functionality of the equipment. They might use storytelling and imagery to evoke the thrill of the outdoors, making the gear a means to a memorable experience.

Considerations for implementing this approach include ensuring that the experience promised in marketing materials matches the actual product or service. Overpromising and underdelivering can lead to customer dissatisfaction and damage to brand reputation. It's also crucial to maintain consistency across all touchpoints, from marketing messages to customer service and product quality.

Theoretical models such as Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and the Emotional Experience Model provide useful frameworks for understanding how to appeal to customers on an emotional level. Maslow's model suggests that fulfilling higher-level needs such as esteem and self-actualization can drive emotional engagement. The Emotional Experience Model emphasizes creating positive, memorable experiences that align with customers' emotional desires and aspirations.

Ultimately, by focusing on the experiential aspects of a

product, businesses can create deeper connections with customers, fostering loyalty and driving sales through emotional engagement rather than just transactional interactions. This approach not only enhances customer satisfaction but also builds a stronger, more relatable brand presence.

17. Be the face of your company

Being the face of your company is vital for establishing a strong connection between the organization and its stakeholders. Leaders who actively represent their brands build credibility, foster trust, and create a personal touch that humanizes the company. This visibility helps in cultivating a relatable and trustworthy image, enhancing the brand's appeal.

Bob Collymore, former CEO of Safaricom, was an exemplary leader who embodied the company's values and vision, making Safaricom a household name in Kenya. His public presence and communication helped build trust and credibility for the company, showcasing its commitment to innovation and customer service. Manu Chandaria, chairman of Comcraft Group, exemplifies leadership by actively representing his company and engaging in philanthropic efforts. His public presence and commitment to social causes have strengthened Comcraft's reputation and highlighted its dedication to community development in Kenya.

Elon Musk, CEO of Tesla and SpaceX, is another prominent example. Musk's active role in publicizing his companies, sharing his vision through social media, and participating in interviews, has solidified his position as a key figure in the tech and automotive industries. His high-profile presence has significantly influenced the public's perception of Tesla and SpaceX. Jeff Bezos, the founder of Amazon, has been instrumental in representing his company's mission and values. His public appearances, media

engagements, and personal branding have contributed to Amazon's image as a pioneering and customer-centric organization.

Donald Trump, former President and businessman, is a well-known figure who has been synonymous with his brand, The Trump Organization. His public persona and media presence have been integral to the company's identity, even as he transitioned to politics. Richard Branson, founder of the Virgin Group, is another notable example. Branson's adventurous spirit and frequent media appearances have helped personify the Virgin brand, which is known for its innovation and unconventional approach.

Jack Ma, co-founder of Alibaba Group, has effectively been the face of his company through his public engagements and inspirational speeches. His visibility has been crucial in shaping Alibaba's global image and fostering trust among investors and customers. Mukesh Ambani, chairman of Reliance Industries, represents his company's ambition and growth in India. His presence in public events and media showcases Reliance's role in driving economic progress and innovation in the country.

Masayoshi Son, founder and CEO of SoftBank, has been a prominent face of his company, particularly through his bold investments and public statements. His visibility has helped position SoftBank as a major player in the global technology investment landscape. Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google, represents the company's commitment to innovation and technological advancement. His public appearances and communication strategies have played a key role in maintaining Google's positive image and fostering trust.

Mark Zuckerberg, co-founder and CEO of Meta Platforms (formerly Facebook), has been central to representing his company. Despite facing controversies, his visibility has been essential in addressing public concerns and reinforcing Meta's

mission in social networking and technology. Sheryl Sandberg, former COO of Facebook, also played a significant role in representing the company, especially in advocating for women's leadership and social issues. Her visibility helped shape Facebook's corporate culture and public perception.

These leaders exemplify the importance of being the face of their companies. Their active representation, through various channels and public engagements, has significantly impacted their companies' success and how they are perceived globally. For those who are shy or uncomfortable with public attention, navigating this role requires a gradual approach. Start by engaging in smaller, controlled interactions and progressively expand your comfort zone. Utilize various communication channels, such as written content, podcasts, or virtual meetings, to ease into a more visible role. Seek support from communication professionals or mentors to build confidence and refine public speaking skills. Ultimately, embracing the role of the company's face not only strengthens the brand but also contributes to effective leadership by establishing a direct and authentic connection with stakeholders. One persistent characteristic I have discovered behind many failed or failing startups is a founder who does not want to be associated with the brand they claim to believe in, and only waits until the company has grown to show up.

18. Invest in market research

Investing in market research is not just a valuable strategy; it is a crucial secret to achieving lasting success in the dynamic business landscape. Understanding that the market is ever-evolving is paramount for any brand aiming to thrive. Customer needs and preferences are subject to change based on various factors, some within your control and others beyond. Successful brands recognize that stagnation is not an option; they constantly engage

in market research to stay ahead of shifting trends.

Market needs and consumer preferences can transform in a matter of minutes after completing a research report. This emphasizes the necessity for brands to remain vigilant, seeking clear, consistent, and constant feedback to adapt swiftly. Picture the consumer market as a vigilant parent watching over a child. Just as you wouldn't take your eyes off a child for fear of unforeseen mishaps, the same principle applies to the market. Once you cease observation, unforeseen challenges may arise.

Below are some of the helpful tools that can be used for market research;

- i. Surveys and questionnaires: Get to know your customers by asking them directly. Surveys and questionnaires, whether online or in person, help collect valuable insights.
- ii. Customer interviews: Have one-on-one conversations with your customers. Ask them about their experiences, preferences, and what they look for in a product or service.
- iii. Social media listening: Keep an ear out on social media. People often share their opinions and experiences online. Tools like social media listening software can help track and analyze these conversations.
- iv. Competitor analysis: Check out what your competitors are doing. What works for them? What doesn't? Learning from their successes and mistakes can guide your own strategy.
- v. Online analytics: Utilize tools like Google Analytics for your website. Understand where your website visitors come from, what they do on your site, and how long they stay.
- vi. Focus groups: Bring a small group of people together to discuss your product or service. This interactive approach

can provide in-depth insights.

- vii. Trend analysis: Stay updated on industry trends. This could involve reading industry reports, attending conferences, or subscribing to relevant publications.
- viii. Feedback forms: After a customer makes a purchase or uses your service, ask for feedback. This can be through forms, emails, or even quick online surveys.

To thrive as a brand, the learning process should never stop. Heavy investment in market research is not an expenditure; it is an invaluable investment in the longevity and relevance of your brand. Relying on data provided by competitors, especially those with more experience, is a risky move. Competitors may not willingly pave the way for your success without a challenge. Therefore, avoid partnerships with competitors for market research or approach them with great strategic caution, ensuring the independence and integrity of your strategic insights. The key to sustained organizational success lies in an unyielding commitment to learning and a proactive approach to understanding and responding to the ever-changing dynamics of the market.

19. Prioritize a clear and valuable impact

There is a reason why you go into business, and this should never leave your mind as long as you are still running the business. The purpose and motivation that drove you to start the business should be a constant factor, firm enough to weather any situations, to inspire you during the times when you are low in spirit, and to give you reason to smile during times of happiness. Now let me say that I believe any business that begins with the sole intention of making money does not go far, before that it begins to shake under the weight of reality. Any time when someone starts a business with the sole mindset of wanting to make money, there are many

bugs waiting to bite, and usually, there is never satisfaction in such a business.

Money is important, as a matter of fact, money is the lifeline of a brand, but if it comes before the desire to make an impact, there is imminent failure or frustration lurking. One time I went to the garage, having identified a major problem with my car, and since I didn't have the money right there, and I did not want to go to the bank, I began panicking. So when the mechanic examined the car and found the issue was not actually what I had thought it was, and that it would now cost just a couple shillings to fix, I asked him why he didn't decide to trick me and go for the fixing that would cost more so he could make more? He said, "that is not business. Business is what you do in honesty and integrity, anything else is just theft. I got into this business to fix people's cars' problems, not to steal from them" It moved me that such a great business lesson and ethic could come from an industry I least expected. Let me remind you of the words of Proverbs 22:29 which says, 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? he shall stand before kings; He shall not stand before mean men.'

You start a brand because you want to solve a challenge for a market, and to make an impact in your community, and in return the market rewards you by buying your solution. There are brands that have been began to help people fund raise, others have been founded to help people save their money, others to help people invest and make profit without having to work for it, others have been began to provide assistance to ailing people, others have been began to help people get insurances for their cars and lives so that they are covered in times of accidents, others are began to give care to people's gums and teeth, others provide marketing solutions to help investors build noticeable brands, others are meant to teach people how to make good music, others are formed to make music that can encourage others or help us focus when

doing heavy mental work and so on and so forth. What I am trying to say is that although sometimes we think businesses are began to make money, in reality, businesses should be started to solve societal problems.

As long as you are in business, you are bound to make money, but if you put money before impact and the solution you are presenting to the society, you are bound to lose track somewhere. If you follow money, you will never be satisfied, because you will never have enough, but if your focus as a brand is to make impact, you will be satisfied because you will touch a life somewhere, and be rewarded in form of purchases. You may never be able to solve everyone's problems, but that one life you touch is a star in your brand's crown.

You have got to have a reason why you started, the impact you want to make, and this should in my opinion never be replaced with the need to make money from the business. Even if you will lose a few dollars just so you can make impact on someone's life, you can choose to, it's your call. That should not be taken to imply you should not make money, what I said is, make money while solving a real problem, that is the impact.

20. Master communication skills

Building effective communication skills is essential for successful leadership, requiring a clear and intentional approach for both internal and external audiences. Poor communication is the mother of many wrangles in workplaces, and investing in excellence in communication has for the longest time been a valuable decision to workplaces.

Internally, fostering active listening is key. Leaders should pay full attention to team members, clarify doubts, and summarize information to ensure mutual understanding. Cultivating empathy

is equally crucial, promoting a supportive and collaborative work environment. Clear and concise written communication is a foundational skill, ensuring that emails, messages, and internal documents are easily understood. Efficient meetings contribute to internal communication. Leaders should set clear agendas, encourage participation, and summarize key takeaways to respect participants' time. Establishing a constructive feedback mechanism is important for open communication and continuous improvement, encouraging team members to share feedback and suggestions. Conflict resolution skills play a vital role in addressing internal disputes promptly and diplomatically.

Externally, tailoring messages to the audience is paramount. Understanding the needs, preferences, and interests of external stakeholders enhances engagement. Mastering the art of storytelling allows leaders to convey complex information in a compelling and relatable manner, fostering a deeper connection. Investing in media training equips leaders to handle interviews, articulate key messages, and navigate potential challenges. Building a strong digital presence through social media and maintaining consistency in messaging helps engage a diverse audience. Honing public speaking skills ensures clear articulation, confident body language, and effective use of visual aids.

Networking is a valuable skill for establishing and maintaining meaningful connections. Leaders should attend industry events, conferences, and forums to expand their professional network. Crisis communication planning is crucial, requiring transparency, prompt acknowledgment of issues, and communication of steps being taken to resolve them. Cultural sensitivity in communication is essential to recognize and respect diverse cultural differences, avoiding misunderstandings. Actively seeking feedback from customers through surveys, reviews, and direct interactions helps leaders improve products, services, and communication strategies.

Continuous learning is a mindset that leaders should adopt to stay updated on communication trends, tools, and technologies. Embracing this approach ensures adaptability to evolving communication landscapes. By incorporating these skills and strategies into their communication approach, leaders like you can build strong, effective, and adaptive communication channels both within their organizations and with external stakeholders.

21. Master time management skills

Time is everything to successful brands. You would rather waste money but not time, for money you can regain, but time, you cannot. Successful brands know that time matters, and so they do not just open for the sake of being open, rather, every minute, every second is calculated, all factors held constant. Right from the top management to the lowest employee, brands that *become* have established a culture of timeliness in all operations. There is time to report, time to start, time to stop, time to break, time to rest, time to leave and time to plan among others.

It is important to point out here that something as common as timeliness can be a brand's only competitive advantage in a raging storm of competition. The more time-conscious a brand is, the timelier its clientele is. Mostly, clients will adopt the culture they tap from an organization. In Kenya, if you happen to work with individuals who are keen on their time, you must have come across a phrase such as *masaa ya mzungu* (by no means should you get late).

We Africans, well not all, are labeled as notoriously guilty of failing to keep time. However, many individuals and organizations have come to appreciate that without proper time management, no meaningful progress can be made. As such, we have turned to phone reminders, email notifications, friends, calendars and diaries

to be our constant and faithful reminders of the days and times when we need to make specific appointments. This has become quite helpful in making sure we fulfill our obligations, since nowadays, if you miss an appointment by a minute, you are as good as wasted. Employers are not welcoming to lateness, and so are employees. We are all running very busy lives, so if you have employed people from 9-5, you had better use that time wisely, because at 5, they may just storm out of that office to be in an investors meeting at 505pm, and for the most part, you may have absolutely no justification and obligation to convince them otherwise. Just because you have employed someone does not give you the right to mismanage their time, nor do employees have the right to misuse the time when you are paying them to work for you.

In your organization, time management can be seen even from the manner in which your security personnel at the gate frisk people as they enter, the manner in which employees walk around the business premises, the time they take to set up and begin work, the conversations they have, their facial expressions, the contributions they make during meetings and so forth. When employees learn the culture of time management within the organization, they are better placed to make decisions and contributions during meetings. The meetings end faster, because people have learned how to go straight to the point. People know how to say no, later, and/ or yes. Clients will definitely learn that you have a no-nonsense policy on time, and will learn to keep time and conversations short and straight to the point. Suppliers will learn to deliver in time and distributors throughout your value chain will know you do not tolerate lateness.

Now I am not saying that you should not be patient, or that you should not leave a leeway for people to be a little late. All I am saying is, you should teach your stakeholders that if they anticipate

they will be late, they should tell you in advance, so you can do something else meanwhile as you wait for them. In addition, learn to always have a plan b, so that should someone get late for an appointment or ask for a little more time, you can always use that time to do something else that will add value to you. Never put all your trays in one basket when it comes to time. For example, if you are attending a breakfast meeting with a potential client, carry your laptop and finish your backlog, just in case the client is late.

As an entrepreneur, it starts with you. Show your team the way by reporting to work early, leaving at the right time and observing time during the workday.

22. Master emotional intelligence

To truly excel in leadership, mastering emotional intelligence becomes a paramount skill. An entrepreneur or manager must navigate the intricate landscape of emotions, understanding the subtle difference between a smile and a grin. Strategic emotional acumen involves knowing when to effortlessly smile, and when to don a more serious grin to convey a firm message. Consistently maintaining a genial demeanor is not without its pitfalls; being perceived as a manager who is always wearing a smile can inadvertently invite exploitation from employees. The key lies in the art of seamlessly transitioning between smiles and grins, adapting within microseconds to the demands of the situation.

Developing emotional intelligence is a journey that involves self-awareness, empathy, and effective interpersonal skills. To cultivate emotional intelligence, start by enhancing your self-awareness. Regularly reflect on your emotions, identifying the triggers, patterns, and the impact they have on your decision-making. Journaling can be a helpful tool to track and analyze your emotional responses. Next, work on understanding and managing

your emotions. Practice mindfulness techniques, such as deep breathing or meditation, to stay present and avoid being overwhelmed by intense emotions. Learn to recognize the signs of emotional escalation and develop strategies to calm yourself in challenging situations.

Empathy is a cornerstone of emotional intelligence. Actively listen to others, seeking to understand their perspectives without judgment. Put yourself in their shoes to grasp their emotions and respond with genuine understanding. Engage in open and honest communication, encouraging feedback to refine your empathetic skills. Improving interpersonal relationships is another crucial aspect. Focus on effective communication by expressing your emotions clearly and assertively while considering the feelings of others. Develop conflict resolution skills, aiming for win-win solutions that prioritize collaboration over confrontation. Continuous learning is key to refining emotional intelligence. Seek feedback from peers, mentors, or coaches to gain insights into areas for improvement. Read literature on emotional intelligence, attend workshops, and engage in activities that challenge and expand your emotional repertoire.

Lastly, practice humility and openness to change. Acknowledge that emotional intelligence is an evolving skill, and be willing to adapt your behaviors based on feedback and experiences. By consistently working on these practical steps, you can cultivate a higher level of emotional intelligence, fostering more meaningful connections and effective leadership in both personal and professional settings.

Employees will sometimes make mistakes or *mistakes*. Sometimes, your employees will steal from you. Other times, they will lie to you, or add an extra zero in a cheque, or forget a zero in a quote. Other times, your suppliers will cheat on you with your competitors. You need to know when to punish and when to sit

down and have a little talk, or overlook some behavior.

It will not all be bliss. There will be times when you will come to work moody, and you will not want to talk to anybody. These are the times you need to know where to hide. Otherwise, that one word you might speak out of anger and frustration might ruin someone's personal academic, social and professional life. You need to be aware of the role you play as a leader, and hence the impact of your words on your people.

Let me give you a story a friend of mine once shared with me. A young man saw his primary school teacher at a wedding ceremony. He went to greet him with all respect and admiration!! He said to him:

"Can you still recognize me Sir?"

'I don't think so!!' said the Teacher, 'could you please remind me how we met?'

The student recounted:

"I was your student in 3rd grade, I stole a wrist watch belonging to my then classmate because it was unique and fascinating. My classmate came to you crying that his wrist watch had been stolen and you ordered all students in the class to stand in a straight line, facing the wall with our hands up and our eyes closed so you could check our pockets. At this point, I became jittery and terrified of the outcome of the search. The shame I would face after other students discovered that I stole the watch, the opinions my teachers would form of me, the thought of being named a 'thief' till I left the school and my parents' reaction when they got to know about my action. All these thoughts were flowing across my heart, when suddenly it was my turn to be checked. I felt your hand slip into my pocket and you brought out the watch. I was gripped with fear, expecting the worst to be announced. I was surprised I didn't hear

anything, but sir, you continued searching other students' pockets till you got to the last person. When the search was over, you asked us to open our eyes and sit on our chairs. I was afraid to sit because I was thinking you will call me out soon after everyone was seated. But to my amazement, you showed the watch to the class, gave it to the owner and you never mentioned the name of the one who stole the watch. You didn't say a word to me, and you never mentioned the story to anyone. Throughout my stay in the school, no teacher or student knew what happened. This incident naturally taught me a great lesson and I resolved in my heart never to get myself involved in taking whatever is not mine. I thought to myself, you saved my dignity."

"Do you remember the story now sir? You can't simply forget this story sir!!"

The teacher replied, ' I vividly remember the story that I found the watch in a pocket, but I did not know in whose pocket the stolen watch was found that day because I searched your pockets while I also had my eyes closed."

In life, we need wisdom for everything we do. As parents, teachers, leaders etc... We should be able to close our eyes to some things. Not all misbehavior must attract punishment. Some will need encouragement, some mentoring and some monitoring. Be a leader who impacts not one who shatters.

Sometimes, reprimand. Sometimes, fire. Sometimes, care. Sometimes, hire. A business leader must know when to switch from being a lord to being a father. Especially so, in the event that you are older than some of your employees, take time to motivate them, outside of work context. They look up to you. Do not make yourself inaccessible. Motivate them to get to where you are. One day they will remember that were it not for your contribution to their lives, they would not be where they are. It is not in vain to get

personal with your employees and care about their well-being, of course with respectable and reasonable boundaries. It is a sign that you are not just a master over them, but a mentor and friend they can trust.

23. Master negotiation skills

Negotiation skills stand as a cornerstone in the toolkit of effective business leadership, offering the ability to navigate complexities, establish fruitful partnerships, and secure favorable outcomes. Becoming proficient in negotiation is a pivotal competency that can greatly influence your success. It involves a strategic dialogue aimed at creating value for all parties involved, extending beyond mere compromise. Recognizing its importance in various business contexts—from deal-making to conflict resolution—is fundamental to mastering this skill.

To negotiate effectively, thorough preparation is paramount. Understanding the interests, positions, and potential objections of both parties enhances decision-making and the likelihood of positive outcomes. Clearly defining your objectives is equally crucial, providing a guiding framework for your negotiation strategy and facilitating effective communication.

Active listening is a hallmark of successful negotiators. Attentively understanding the concerns and perspectives of the other party not only demonstrates respect but also provides valuable insights for finding mutually beneficial solutions. Flexibility and creativity play key roles, encouraging an open-minded approach to alternative solutions and compromises. Building rapport establishes a positive and collaborative atmosphere, fostering trust that is integral to smoother negotiations. Patience and persistence are essential, especially in challenging or prolonged discussions. Knowing when to walk

away preserves your negotiating power and sets the stage for future engagements.

Non-verbal communication, including body language and tone of voice, adds depth to negotiations. Being attuned to these cues enhances overall communication effectiveness. Seeking win-win solutions ensures that agreements are satisfactory to all parties, fostering long-term relationships and a positive business reputation. Incorporating these practical strategies into your negotiation approach enhances your effectiveness not only as a negotiator but also as a business leader, contributing significantly to your overall success.

24. Get your pricing right

An effective pricing strategy is paramount for the success of new businesses as it directly impacts revenue, market positioning, and overall competitiveness. A well-thought-out pricing strategy not only ensures profitability but also plays a pivotal role in attracting and retaining customers. It sets the perceived value of a product or service and influences consumer behavior, making it a strategic component for sustainable growth.

Various pricing strategies cater to different business objectives. Cost-plus pricing involves determining costs and adding a desired profit margin. Competitive pricing involves setting prices based on competitors' offerings. Value-based pricing aligns prices with the perceived value by customers. Dynamic pricing adjusts prices based on market demand and other external factors. Skimming strategy involves setting higher initial prices and gradually lowering them, targeting early adopters. Penetration pricing, on the other hand, sets lower initial prices to quickly capture market share.

Choosing the right pricing strategy requires a deep

understanding of the market, target customers, and the unique value proposition of the business, ensuring a balanced approach to pricing that supports growth and profitability.

25. Take lessons on business liquidity

A pivotal aspect of effective business management revolves around the unwavering commitment to ensuring business liquidity, the measure of a company's ability to meet short-term financial obligations promptly. In the dynamic business landscape, liquidity serves as a financial lifeline, empowering businesses to navigate unforeseen challenges, seize strategic opportunities, and maintain overall fiscal resilience. Below are just a few of the practical steps you can take to ensure your business remains liquid at all times.

Implement a robust cash flow management system. This involves monitoring the inflow and outflow of cash, negotiating favorable payment terms with suppliers, and optimizing inventory levels through just-in-time practices. The efficient management of accounts receivable is also crucial, including clear credit policies, credit checks, and the use of technology to automate invoicing and payment processes. Furthermore, maintaining an emergency fund provides a proactive approach to safeguarding liquidity during unexpected downturns. This financial buffer ensures flexibility in navigating unforeseen challenges without compromising daily operations. Diversifying financing options, such as exploring lines of credit or short-term loans, adds an additional layer of flexibility in times of liquidity strain.

Continual monitoring and adjustment are paramount as liquidity is dynamic and subject to changes in market conditions, business growth, or shifts in customer behavior. Regular reviews of financial strategies enable businesses to adapt swiftly, ensuring liquidity remains robust and aligned with the evolving needs of the

organization. The moment your business stops being liquid, you are sitting on a ticking time bomb, and you better run or fix the issue.

26. Consult widely; manage your ego

One of the biggest hindrances that we face as entrepreneurs is our attitude. Many are the times we either trust too easily, or we refuse to trust for far too long. As an entrepreneur, you stand to benefit a lot by letting other people advise you. Giving others a chance to advise you does not mean that you do not know what you are doing or saying, it means you are wise enough to allow other people to add valuable contributions to your work.

There is nothing as embarrassing as having turned down advice, then you have to go back for the piece of advice sometime later. Chances are the adviser may ridicule you and not end up telling you, or they might have already forgotten, or have run out of the inspiration of the advice. While at it, when you go out consulting, remember to know up to what point you will accept guidance. There are times when some counsel doesn't help at all, so you must know when to stop listening. This is a skill that is delicate; if you stop too early or too late, you will lose either way. In addition, you must know who to consult. Not everyone wants the best for you, and so you must be sober while making the decision as to who is fit to be consulted. If you choose the wrong person, you will not be sure your ideas are safe, and you will also not be able to share your intricate business secrets, which means you will be seeking half-baked advice, which may not actually help you much. Your choice for consultation should be someone, or a firm that you have confidence in, one that you can share even your most intricate secrets with, and be at peace.

It has always been said that seeking wisdom does not reflect

stupidity. As a matter of fact, those who ask, know, and those who know, know. When I first rolled out in business, I had a kind of attitude that could not be told, or advised. I remember making heavy transactions in the *dark* because I did not want to be advised. I thought I knew it all, but life showed me that I had a lot of lessons I still needed to learn, which I have gradually and initially unwillingly opened my mind to. For every single investment I made in my early 20's, I was either duped or overcharged yet had I asked, I would have been able to invest in even more fruitful ventures. For me to accept being told, I had to be humbled in many different ways. By the time life had humbled me enough to take advice from friends and family, I had lost thousands of dollars. Sometimes I sit back to think, I wish someone, some book, some video, some newspaper had talked to me about the importance of consulting trusted people earlier on in life.

It is not by chance that there are people ahead of you who have been in business for a longer time, and as such have much more experience than you may have. These people are not a threat, and some of them don't even want to benefit from your money, nor are they interested in *stealing* your business ideas. It is not foolish to consult these people and seek to know their opinions on such and such a business idea that you are thinking of venturing into. As it is now, before making a business decision, I not only think twice, but I also consult mercilessly.

I have come to learn the importance of consulting those who have been where I intend to be, or close, because as much as they may not have all the words I need to hear, there are one or two sentences they may know that could mean the difference between success and failure.

27. Your product must be known, or it won't matter

Many are the times when we start a business and leave its future to luck, not knowing the importance of creating awareness about the brand. One important thing to know is that customers buy from businesses, mostly because they know them, and what they do. There are very many brands with a lot of potential hidden somewhere in cages all over the world, their biggest ailment, no one knows about them.

Today, if I walk into a store to get myself a phone, I will either go knowing the brand I am looking for, or will very easily be attracted to a brand that I already know. As an Apple user, when you walk into an Apple store, you will probably already know that you intend to buy either an iPhone 9 (sic), 10, 11 or 14 or 15. In your mind, you will already be aware of what you want to buy. When you get to the store, chances of convincing you to buy another brand, no matter how cheap or sophisticated the brand is, are very low. It can largely be agreed upon that Apple has created such a strong brand awareness that we know them even in our dreams.

What you want to create is a brand name that becomes a household name. Some of the household names that we know include Samsung for their fridges, phones, laptops, televisions etc., Yamaha for their drums, pianos, keyboards, guitars and motorbikes, Apple for their electronics, CNN for their news, Barack Obama and Donald Trump for their political activities, Mercedes Benz for their cars, Sony for their electronics, McDonalds for their food products etc.

You want to create a brand that even the smallest child will be aware of. You want to create a brand that you are sure when you walk down the street, you are likely to hear at least several random people speak about it. You want to create a brand that everyone

will want to associate with, whether or not they know what you are.

Now creating a brand awareness may or may not be a one-day activity. Some companies take a long time to be known, while others are just an instant hit. For example, President George W. Bush., was by far much more famous than any of the presidents who have ruled the US. Having grown up at a time when Bush was in charge, I can tell you we all wanted to be little Bushes. We could try to adopt some mannerisms that depicted our admiration for Bush, including trying to speak just like him. As a result, traders were clever enough to invest in selling merchandise that made us feel Bush-like. There were many military-like hats, calendars with the portrait of Bush, t-shirts and diaries. Bush was an international brand name that even the old identified with. Some of us had no idea what or who Bush was, but we wanted to be associated with whoever this Bush was.

Creating a strong brand awareness goes together with a very effective operational and marketing strategy. We cannot know who you are unless you devise effective ways of introducing yourself. So the mistake that many businesses make is assume that since they have been registered, the spending spree has ended. Dearest friends, the journey has just begun. After registration there is a need for a lot of marketing. In doing so, you must understand what will most captivate your target audience. For example, while in the US many adverts are made in the form of an informative skit, in Kenya, most of the adverts are made in the form of a comedy.

In Kenya, the norm among a huge number of viewers is, if your advert does not make me laugh, I am not watching it, unless you are a known brand that I like anyway. This could explain the reason you will notice there is a boom in the number of comedians taking up advertising roles. In fact as it is now, most companies are paying vloggers to make skits, and at the end of the video, the

products of that company or contacts are shared. There is a very sharp contrast between this and what happens in India. Indian adverts are somewhat closer to the American adverts, but are somewhere in between that and the Kenyan version. This goes to tell you that you cannot, or rather let me say it is not advisable to have a single advert that you intend to be consumed by different groups of people within the market. You must be able to know what is best for which segment of your clientele. To create a marketing strategy that works to the benefit of your brand's publicity.

28. Even small brands can make big impact

Sometimes we are held back by the feeling of being too small to be doing incredible things. This is a bondage that can very easily follow us through the lifetime of our brands. We so often have incredible ideas, but ask ourselves, how come other big brands aren't doing such things? Because of that, we panic and fail to do so. We tend to think we will be ridiculed if we tend to be better than what has been known as the best. As a result, we give up on ideas that would change the world. This mustn't be the case. All big brands started somewhere, and yours is just beginning. Let nothing hinder you from trying out those incredible ideas. Allow nothing to hinder you from making it. Just because others have not made it does not mean you will not make it. Let me remind you of one brand that changed the world, notwithstanding its initial concept and size. Beginning as a small platform for renting air mattresses in a spare room, Airbnb has evolved into a global hospitality giant, connecting travelers with unique accommodations around the world.

Don't be satisfied with the taste of failure that other people tell you. If you want your brand to succeed, fold your sleeves, overcome your fears and taste that failure yourself, you may find

out it is not as bitter as you were made to think. Define your own limits. You have all it takes to grow and excel, so don't panic or give up. Don't be satisfied with the argument that you are too small to do stuff, let no one tell you that. You have come so far to look down on yourself. Keep believing in the vision that motivated you to start. Remember, it is not the size of the dog, it is the size of the fight in the dog.

29. Don't lose sight of the customer

Sometimes businesses fail because we get too excited or attached to our products until we refuse to listen to the person who makes the purchase decision. Oftentimes we try to force solutions down the throats of customers, whether they like it or not. One evening I was having a dinner meeting with one of my protégé, and he asked me, so what would you recommend for me as I start my business? I looked up and said, business is not all about what you have made for the customer, but about delivering value in a manner that makes the customer find your product sensible and the experience of acquiring and using the product satisfactory. Once you have won them over, you have little to worry about. What will keep you in business is having a clientele that loves you, otherwise, there will probably be hundreds of people who will do the same thing you want to do, and maybe even better than you, but because they listen to the customer, they know something that you don't.

If you want to make a significant impact in business, you have to be able to master what your people like, and use that against them to win their minds and hearts. Some of the clients just want a nice hotel that they will not be embarrassed about being seen entering or leaving. Others want a cheap hotel they can afford. Some people want class, others want comfort, others price, others want courtesy. There are people who will pay thousands of dollars

more for the same service they could have received at a hundred dollars, if they are assured of privacy and comfort. You have to know who you are serving, and what they want. There are people who will never pay a penny more, but there are others who have no issue with money, as long as you deliver in time.

There are customers who focus on quantity, others on quality. The point is, never go into the market blindly. You have to know what your clientele wants. If it is a price reduction, deliver. If it is class, deliver on that. If it is comfort, deliver on that. If it is privacy, deliver on that. You can even have different packages for different groups of people. There are some who want their cars customized, but others will just buy what is available. Some will want their suits tailored, others will buy what they can see.

We all have needs, but there is a reason why we choose to use certain brands to solve those needs. For example, we all have communication needs, that is a constant, but we choose to solve this need through different options, such as landlines, various brands of mobile phones, Skype, email, Zoom, Facebook, Google Meet etc. We also have a need for entertainment, but we chose to be entertained differently. While some choose live music, others want the radio, others want TV, and others want the newly launched Apple streaming services while still others want Netflix. The point I am putting across is that if you focus on the need, you will succeed, eventually, but it could take you longer. Don't just focus on the need, focus on your people, the market. Focus on meeting your clients' level of satisfaction, and not just solving the need. So don't invest in a business that you may succeed in, invest in a business that you will succeed in. So you have to know your client in order to get business out of them. You have to know what your customers like, and avail it to them, or you are wasting their and your time and money.

If you want to make a significant impact in business, your job

is not only to know that a customer has a need—that is pretty much obvious—yours is to know what customers are looking for in a solution, and provide that in a way that will make them enjoy the experience of buying the solution. In the 21st century business, you don't just sell solutions, you sell solutions that must meet your clientele's irreducible minimums, be it class, comfort, price, size, color, make, year or manufacture or whatever it is.

30. Lead don't boss

Leaders boss from within the team, but bosses lead from without. Leaders will be the first to plunge into problems should the organization find itself in problems, but bosses will be the last to get into trouble when their organization falls into problems. Leaders show others the way, and they do so from the front-line. Bosses show the way, yes, but from a far off. Bosses will go to war, but will be drinking wine while their soldiers are dying on the front-line in battle, but leaders will be dying in war with their soldiers.

A leader, as opposed to a boss, is someone who not only guides the team but actively participates in problem-solving at the frontline. Leading by example is paramount—leaders must embody the values and work ethic they expect from their team. Effective communication plays a pivotal role; leaders need to establish an open and transparent dialogue, fostering an environment where ideas can freely flow. Being hands-on is a cornerstone of successful leadership, particularly in the early stages of a business. Leaders should immerse themselves in day-to-day operations, gaining a profound understanding of the challenges their team faces. A strategic vision is another critical component; leaders must articulate a compelling vision that motivates and aligns the team toward long-term goals.

Adaptability is a key trait, as leaders must navigate a rapidly evolving business landscape and be willing to adjust strategies when necessary. Empowering and supporting the team is equally important. Leaders should create a work environment that values and nurtures individual contributions, providing autonomy and growth opportunities. Continuous learning is a hallmark of effective leaders; they should actively seek feedback, stay informed about industry trends, and invest in their professional development.

If you want your organization to succeed in its infancy, lead, do not boss. Especially when your organization is less than seven years old, you cannot afford to be sitting pretty while other people try to figure out what your vision was in the first place. Before you know it, your coffee shop will be selling rubber imports from Ghana, or cocoa from Congo. To go past the seven year threshold safely, you have to be a hands-on leader, showing your team what exactly you had in mind when you started out. You have to be there to show them what needs to be done to achieve the vision of the brand that you have in mind.

31. Mentorship over rulership

Shifting from a command-and-control leadership style to a mentorship approach is both a strategic and transformative move for entrepreneurs dealing with the pressures of success. The key distinction between ruling with an iron fist and mentoring lies in the value imparted to employees. As a mentor, you do more than direct tasks; you help your team understand the founder's vision and cultivate their own entrepreneurial spirit. This approach goes beyond financial success to develop employees into individuals equipped with the skills and mindset necessary for entrepreneurial ventures.

Effective mentorship involves leading by example, creating a learning environment through knowledge-sharing platforms, and implementing tailored mentorship plans. Providing regular feedback, encouraging entrepreneurial thinking, and fostering a sense of ownership and accountability are crucial components. Celebrating milestones also plays a significant role in a successful mentorship strategy. By embedding mentorship into the organizational culture, you transform the workplace into a dynamic, collaborative space where continuous growth and success become integral.

Considerations for adopting a mentorship approach include ensuring that mentors are experienced and willing to guide others and creating structured mentorship programs aligned with organizational goals. One significant advantage of mentorship is its impact on employee engagement and retention by providing opportunities for personal and professional development. It also fosters innovative thinking and problem-solving as employees are encouraged to adopt an entrepreneurial mindset.

An example of successful mentorship is Toyota in Japan. Toyota's approach to mentorship is deeply embedded in its organizational culture. The company's mentorship programs focus on developing leadership skills and fostering continuous improvement, aligning with the principles of the Toyota Production System. By investing in employee development through structured mentoring, Toyota has maintained its reputation for innovation and operational excellence. This approach has helped the company remain a leader in the automotive industry, demonstrating the value of mentorship in driving long-term success.

32. Cultivate a winning organizational culture

John Doerr in his book *Measure What Matters* talks about the importance of organizational culture, and summarizes it as helping to align a brand's objectives and key results (OKRs) to its VMSA. He further emphasizes the importance of not only portraying the culture only by words, but also by deeds. This means, do not just say you keep time or that you listen to your clients, but actually do listen to them, and respect their time. Do not just say you are eco-friendly, but be seen promoting environmental-friendly activities within and without. If you put a poster that your organizational premises are a corruption-free zone, resist the temptation to take that bribe. If you claim you are drug-free zone, either have a smoking zone, (if you must), or don't take that puff, even in secret.

In defining the culture, think about what you want to be remembered for, what you want your staff to grow into, and what behaviors you are trying to nurture. A brand culture represents the values, assumptions and beliefs that the organization has. It is basically the philosophy guiding the existence and operation of the brand. There are several types of organizational cultures, including clan, adhocracy, market and hierarchy, and I will recommend that you research and read more about the same, in order to help you define an organizational culture and if you already have one, to review it against your VMSA.

Oftentimes, because of the pressure to want to be professional, we end up setting cultures that are not compatible with our organizations, especially during their infancy. Because of over-expecting, we may end up hoping too much, and proposing cultural elements that will not work for us. It is important for top leadership to understand its environment, and come up with a culture that is compatible with the organization. Otherwise, an organization may have a list of fancy words describing its culture, but at the end of

the day, find that it is way harder to implement such, than to quit, and having communicated the culture to the market, it then becomes even harder to live outside of the promise documented in the culture. When coming up with a brand culture, be *realistic*.

33. Don't be a slave of history, redefine the threshold

This lesson is a delicate one to learn. Well, first, let me begin by contradicting myself and saying you must listen to statistics, because they give you an idea of what to do, and how others performed when they tried to do what you are thinking of, or doing. As a matter of fact, it is said that statistics don't lie. What you should not do is overly rely, and adopt those statistics as a measure of how much you can achieve. The success of other people before you should not define how high you can climb, but how low you cannot fall. The minimum is defined, but the maximum is for you to define. If it has been said that no company can make \$1,000 in its first day of operations, close your ears and challenge it.

Statistics are figures that others before you have defined, let them not scare you. You have what it takes to redefine the statistics. You have no limits to what you can do. You can be as good as you choose to, or as bad as you choose to. If it has been said only those companies that are 5 years and older that can penetrate a certain market segment, defy statistics and go for the ultimate prize. If you confine yourself to the bondage of judging yourself based on history, you will never stand out. If you are a personal brand that wants to venture into a particular field, let no one tell you that you are too young for it. If you know in your heart that is your calling, go for it. Just because there has not been someone like you to challenge history does not mean we cannot outwit history, just be the change you are looking for.

Dare to redefine what others have set as the standard of accomplishment. Others have said that you cannot start a business without a loan and make it. Prove to yourself that it is possible. Others say you cannot work with family members and succeed. Prove to yourself it is possible. Others say that if you see a business making such huge losses it is doomed to fail. Prove to yourself that you can rise up and beat the storm.

34. Resist the temptation towards entitlement

This is one of my most favorite. So many times, when you start a brand, be it a personal brand or an organization, the founders tend to get entitled, and because of that, they put ego ahead of work. I know you might have been a founding employee of an organization, and if you look at it, there is a very big difference between how the founding CEO behaves and how all others behave. As a matter of fact, unless one is very careful, the founders are the same people who bring down their very organizations because of pride and ego. It is no wonder Albert Einstein said that the more the knowledge, the lesser the ego, the lesser the knowledge the more the ego.

You may find a situation where a founding member does not listen, because they assume they know it all. Many a time a significant number of founding CEOs don't consult, and they assume they know everything there is to know. This is one of the greatest hindrances I have encountered while working with startup businesses. It is very hard to convince a founder to allow someone else to run their organization. Some founders have the tendency to believe that they are the only ones who can drive their vision to success. One thing that they tend to forget is that while there are some people who are blessed with founding ideas, others are blessed with coming up with strategies to make the ideas happen.

The problem with feeling entitled is that it leads to personal bias and may work against the progress of the startup by encouraging the founder and members of the founding team to despise counsel. As much as you are the founder, you have to acknowledge that you cannot work alone, and that is why you got the people to work with you. If you found that you needed other people to get your startup on its feet in the first place, never forget that they are equal partners in your dream. Never disregard your team simply because you were the founder. Separate your ego from work if you want great things to happen to your brand. Humble yourself and work with whoever is important in making your dream fulfilled.

One of the ways to get rid of feeling entitled is to separate yourself from your entity. You did a good thing to have the mind to start, but once you brought your team in, it stopped being your stuff as an individual, and became your stuff as a team. So all the stress, joy and disappointments are a shared asset or liability. That entitlement creates unhealthy obsession catalyzed by ego, which chokes the development of a brand. If you are looking at creating a strong, healthy brand, focus on making a brand that is separate from you as an individual. Come up with a working system that separates you from the organization, meaning that your brand can easily be able to succeed even without you as an individual.

If you hold your brand at ransom, with the mindset that the organization cannot run without you simply because you are the founder, it won't be long before you wish you knew better.

There is nothing wrong with being happy to be associated with a brand that you founded, but don't let that grow into an unhealthy obsession that will crowd your objectivity. The problem with entitlement to a brand as a founder is that what begins as a little sense of association soon escalates into a full-blown and chronic cycle of obsession, mashed with ego. This makes one unable to

differentiate between their personal interests and those of the brand, and even when bad things happen to the brand, say a negative comment is given, the founder ends up taking it personally and bearing the burden as though it were an individual attack.

Something important to note is that if you want to succeed in business, you must be able to take in criticism and work on making your brand better. Otherwise, if you soak in all the bad things that come as though they were individual attacks, you will die of stress, yet you mustn't. Sometimes people will hate what your brand is doing, yet they love you as a person. Sometimes people will hate decisions you make as a brand leader, yet they love you as a person. You must learn to separate your personal life from your corporate life, or else you will end up living a life of pressure, guilt and precarious caution.

So you ask, how can I know if I have the entitlement bug? A person who feels entitled wants you to recognize them and everything they do. If you are entitled, you are aggrieved when asked to carry out roles you consider below your class. Entitled people want to be given the best even when they do not deserve it. Entitled people want to do all the work because they cannot trust anyone else with the work. Entitled people take all the credit for a brand, even when it is a team effort. Entitled people want to be the only face of the brand that is known by the public. Entitled people do not believe in fairness, because that would mean equality, yet they believe they are higher than everyone else. Entitled people have a deep sense of manipulation and excessive control, mostly as a way of making other people feel that there is an authority.

You may not agree with me, but entitled people usually have a low self-esteem, and so for them, this brand is the only real tangible thing they can attach to, and that is why they will protect it with their lives. Entitled people will always remind you of what

they did in the past for the brand to get to where it is. They will hold the whole team ransom in future because of the steps they took at the beginning, and will always remind you of the time and money they spent at the beginning, often as a way of avoiding to making future commitments.

Now entitlement does not only affect the founders of a business, but also some of the employees you get to work with, especially if they are members of the founding team. Some of the employees are often more experienced, probably have more money and status than anyone else, including the founder. If you are not careful, these are the people who will lead your team into infighting and failure. These are the people who look down on others, and they assume that were it not for them, the whole brand would fail. These kinds of employees are dangerous because they do not listen to the advice of other people, and unless their way is taken, they are out. These employees have a kind of attitude that they know even if they come to the meeting late, it will not start before they arrive. When asked to contribute in a meeting, they will take forever because they believe their idea will sail through anyways. Such employees do not even care about the organization's progress, but are more concerned with their own ego. Such are the employees who want to appear smart and sharper than anyone else. Such people do not even do their homework on assignments, because they believe they are inherently genius.

As a business leader, I beseech you for the sake of the growth of your brand, you must know how to handle such people. These are the people who will fight to topple you. If you have been in business before, I am sure you have seen these kinds of employees. This attitude is poison to your growth as a business.

People who feel entitled always play the victim card, and once in a while, they will give you a taste of their mind with a tirade of words. Especially if one is the founder of a brand, they always feel

as though they are being targeted, if any suggestion that seems to be against their personal wish is made. This makes them succeed at holding the rest of the team ransom, making everyone feel as though they are living the most important person behind. That is why I said earlier that entitlement and manipulation go hand in hand. If they are unable to politely convince everyone to follow their way, they will turn themselves into the victims of a subject, and impolitely force everyone to subject to their wishes.

Entitlement and the manipulation that comes with it, if you dig more into it, is often not just a survival tactic at work, but also at home and in personal life. As a result, people who have entitlement complexes are people you do not want to deal with even in personal life, because you just can't trust them. One moment they are with you, the next they are against you, and very insecure about your actions. This is a toxic attitude, because it subjects you to psychological manipulation. But get this right, entitlement can affect both founders and employees.

35. Reward your staff

Employees who are motivated more tend to perform better. The recognition that employees get when they perform their duties makes them feel wanted, and motivates them to perform better. According to Maslow's theory of motivation, human beings have hierarchical needs that need to be fulfilled from the bottom up. Maslow classifies needs into logically a flowing hierarchy, from basic to more superficial needs which are essential and if not satisfied will hinder the development and the growth that can be realized with time. The first tier of human needs includes physiological needs such as food, shelter, clothing, water, air, and are needed for basic survival, and require money to be met. The second tier includes safety needs, emotionally and physically. When employees feel safe, they are motivated to perform. In the

third tier, are social needs such as affection, love, acceptance, friendship and belongingness, of which their presence motivates employees to perform better. Other needs include esteem and self-actualization needs.

Now if you want to motivate your employees, you have to meet these needs. As an entrepreneur, you most certainly cannot meet all the needs of employees, but you can easily design a mechanism of meeting some of the needs in a systematic manner. Do not overlook simple achievements. Develop a culture of rewarding your employees for work well done, and they will reward you with loyalty and best performance. Rewarding can be giving a trophy, a clap, a smile, an increase in pay, or whatever your brand can afford. Congratulate employees for graduating from one stage to the other, whether in academics, family life, a new child, job promotions etc.

Never let a good deed go unrewarded. Condition employees to good behavior with positive reinforcement. B. F. Skinner, in his operant theory of behavior demonstrated that we respond to stimuli based on our conditioning, and in order to condition someone to a certain behavior, the behavior has to be reinforced/ rewarded. So if you want employees to come to work on time, reinforce that behavior, and they will be conditioned to behave as such.

In the business context, the beauty is that positive reinforcement can range from anywhere between a verbal praise to an expensive reward. Just imagine a reward as simple as a verbal praise could jump start the success you so badly need. Skinner's operant conditioning is a method of behavior learning, etched on the use of rewards and punishment to influence behavior. This theory argues that a behavior that is reinforced will be repeated, but a behavior that is not reinforced will not be repeated, or, has little chances of repeat. This theory is actually quite similar to Thorndike's law of effect which states that a behavior that is

followed by a pleasant consequence is likely to be repeated, while those followed by unpleasant consequences are unlikely to be repeated.

Skinner identified three types of operants; neutral operants that neither encourage nor discourage a behavior, reinforcers that motivate a repeat behavior, and can be positive or negative, and punishers that discourage a behavior. Positive reinforcement encourages a behavior by providing a rewarding consequence to an individual. For example, taking the best employee's family on a vacation every 6 months may motivate employees to work so they can be the best. Negative reinforcement encourages a behavior by removing an unpleasant consequence from an individual. For example, if you get your best employee based on points earned over 6 months, and employees lose points if they come to work late (negative consequence) they will be motivated to come to work early (reinforced behavior) so they can retain their points.

There is a very thin line between negative reinforcement and punishment. Punishment weakens behavior. For example, if employees know they will be put on probation if they come late, they will not want to come late. In the workplace environment, using punishment can cause increased aggression among employees, fear, and even resentment, since employees may not easily forget the punishment.

As the business owner, you have the power, or let me say the magic, in your hands to determine the direction your organization takes. You can choose to fail, or choose to succeed. Depending on how well you utilize the reward system around your organization.

36. Make employees feel part of a family

According to Herzberg's Two-Factor theory on employee motivation, employees feel more motivated to work when they feel

recognized by their employer. The best kind of working environment is where employees own up the vision of the proprietor, and work as though the organization were theirs. For this to happen, a business owner needs to create a suitable environment.

Make sure employees share your vision, and that they are to you a family away from their families. When your employees feel like family, they are not strangers to your vision. The worst kind of business scenario, especially for startups, is when you build your brand with strangers. Do not build a brand with strangers. Strangers do not know the value of your brand, and they will sell it at peanuts when they get the chance.

Make your employees part of a big happy work family, and make it so nice that your employees will always look forward to coming to work the next morning. A real family-life includes chastising, caning and caring. An organization where it is all rosy is a fake family, more like a family relationship where there are no fights, however little. It could be an indication that someone somewhere is living a false life, suffering in silence. That someone somewhere is not saying when they are unhappy. A real work-family fights, reconciles and moves on. There is nothing wrong with disagreeing at work, as long as it is for the better of the common good. As a brand leader, if you have disagreements with your staff, do not take it personal. We are all from different backgrounds, so it is only natural that we do not agree on everything, for if we do, there is someone somewhere who is suffering in silence.

An employee who does not understand your vision is a stranger to your brand, and is like a false tooth, that will never feel your pain, neither will you ever feel its pain, so work on making your employees part of a big happy work-family where they are not strangers but partners in your vision.

37. Extend warmth to employees' families

One highly effective way to enhance employee motivation is by integrating elements of their personal lives into the workplace. Companies like Google have pioneered this approach by allowing employees to bring pets and children to work, complete with designated play areas for both. This policy creates a work environment that feels more like home, reducing stress and increasing job satisfaction. By accommodating employees' personal lives, Google not only boosts morale but also fosters a more inclusive and supportive workplace culture.

Additionally, fostering a strong sense of family within the organization can further enhance employee engagement. Inviting employees' families to work events—such as company dinners, holiday parties, and milestone celebrations—helps to bridge the gap between personal and professional life. This inclusion allows employees to share their work environment with their loved ones and strengthens interpersonal connections among team members. For instance, organizing family-friendly events or team-building activities that involve employees' families can build a close-knit, supportive community within the company.

Building on this, creating traditions that celebrate employees' personal milestones, such as retirement parties that include family members, reinforces a culture of appreciation and respect. Such practices not only honor long-term contributions but also create lasting memories and strong emotional bonds between employees and the organization. This approach contributes to a positive work atmosphere where employees feel valued and connected.

In contrast, a lack of personal integration into the work environment can lead to disengagement and diminished motivation. Employees may feel that their work and personal lives are disconnected, which can impact their overall job satisfaction.

By investing in initiatives that merge personal and professional spheres, companies can cultivate a work environment that promotes loyalty, enhances productivity, and reduces turnover. Engaging employees through these personal connections not only helps retain talent but also creates a workplace where individuals are motivated to contribute their best.

38. Set emotional interaction boundaries with employees

Never have intimate relations with employees unless you have a well-thought-out plan and a clear understanding of the potential consequences. This is crucial advice—REPEAT AND WRITE IN CAPS—NEVER HAVE INTIMATE RELATIONS WITH YOUR EMPLOYEES unless you are fully aware, and are willing to bear the cost of the implications. Engaging in such relationships can blur professional boundaries and create significant complications. For instance, Bill Clinton's affair with Monica Lewinsky, a White House intern, not only led to a scandal but also had severe political and personal repercussions. The affair became a focal point in his impeachment proceedings, damaging both his presidency and personal reputation. Additionally, consider the case of E. Scott Reckard, a former CEO of a prominent tech firm who faced a scandal involving an affair with a junior employee. The relationship led to internal conflicts, accusations of favoritism, and eventually, Reckard's forced resignation. This incident highlights how personal entanglements can disrupt workplace harmony, undermine authority, and lead to legal and ethical issues.

The challenges of mixing personal and professional relationships are profound. When intimate relations occur in the workplace, it can result in conflicts of interest and perceived unfairness. For example, if a spouse is in a supervisory role, it becomes difficult to separate personal and professional dynamics. Imagine a scenario where a wife has to reprimand her husband at

work, and then the same issues spill over into their home life. This separation can be nearly impossible, and the resulting tensions can affect both work and personal relationships.

Navigating this delicate balance requires exceptional emotional maturity and professionalism. The risk of personal relationships leading to professional conflicts or misunderstandings is high. If an employee rejects advances or if the relationship deteriorates, it can lead to biased treatment or wrongful termination. To avoid these pitfalls, maintain clear professional boundaries. Ensure that any personal relationships do not interfere with work responsibilities and that they are managed with transparency and respect for all parties involved. Allow workmates to remain professional and soulmates to stay personal, keeping these spheres distinctly separate to protect both your career and personal life.

39. Empower and trust your staff

Trust is a cornerstone of effective leadership and employee motivation, playing a crucial role in fostering a productive and engaged workforce. Trust in a business context involves empowering employees with autonomy, allowing them to make decisions and contribute meaningfully without constant supervision. This approach is grounded in several leadership theories and models that emphasize the importance of delegation, employee empowerment, and motivation.

One prominent theory relevant to this discussion is the Transformational Leadership Theory, which posits that leaders who inspire and motivate their employees through trust and encouragement create a more engaged and committed workforce. Transformational leaders focus on fostering trust by supporting their employees' personal and professional growth, which in turn

enhances their motivation and productivity. This theory highlights the significance of building a culture of trust where employees feel valued and are encouraged to take initiative.

The Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory also provides insights into employee motivation, distinguishing between hygiene factors (such as salary and work conditions) and motivators (such as recognition and responsibility). Trust falls into the category of motivators, as it contributes to employees' sense of achievement and recognition. When employees feel trusted and respected, they are more likely to be motivated and take ownership of their work.

A practical model for implementing trust in the workplace is the Situational Leadership Model, which suggests that leaders should adjust their management style based on the maturity and capability of their employees. By recognizing the unique strengths and weaknesses of their team members, leaders can delegate tasks effectively, providing appropriate levels of supervision and support. This model underscores the importance of adapting leadership approaches to build trust and empower employees according to their individual needs.

Case studies offer valuable insights into the impact of trust on employee motivation. Google's approach to employee empowerment exemplifies the benefits of building a trust-based culture. Google encourages employees to spend 20% of their time on projects of their choice, fostering innovation and ownership. This trust in employees' creativity and autonomy has led to successful initiatives like Gmail and AdSense, demonstrating how empowering employees can drive organizational success.

Conversely, the case of Yahoo under Marissa Mayer's leadership illustrates the pitfalls of mistrust. Mayer's decision to mandate a return to the office, reversing the company's remote work policy, led to significant employee dissatisfaction and

disengagement. Many employees felt that their autonomy and trust had been undermined, resulting in lower morale and increased turnover. This case highlights how a lack of trust can negatively impact employee motivation and overall business performance.

To effectively motivate employees through trust, leaders should prioritize open communication and transparency, allowing team members to voice their ideas and concerns. Creating platforms for idea-sharing and fostering a culture of recognition are also essential. Providing opportunities for professional development, such as training and mentorship, supports employees' growth and enhances their engagement. Moreover, supporting personal goals and building strong, positive relationships with employees contribute to a more cohesive and motivated team.

40. Don't be scared of success

Did you know that many people are more scared of the fear of success than the fear of failure? So many times, people are scared of making daring moves because they are afraid they may succeed, and be unable to handle the aftermath of that success. Sounds crazy right? Starting a brand is not a problem, anyone can do that, but growing the brand is the real challenge, not everyone can do that. There are people who are gifted in making your vision come to be. There are people who have a natural ability to think about your vision, and they will give you ideas and strategies in an organized manner that if you follow, yours will be a story of success in the making.

If you can master how to balance the level of excitement and/or fear that follows after launching your business or a new product, you will have overcome the two biggest hindrances to success in business. Don't be excessively excited or too fearful, for these two

will kill the vision you have for your brand, or your life. Believe it or not, there are people who are scared of growing. Once an entrepreneur starts out, they soon come to realize that there is more to business than just getting the registration papers, what lays ahead is even tougher than the tedious process of registration. Soon after registration is the time to fold your sleeves and implement the vision that motivated you to register your business. The papers you had been waiting for will not actualize the vision for you. It is you who does the dirty work now.

Do not beat yourself so hard when you see your brand is not growing, maybe it is time to ask for help from outside. There are many times when businesses go to a lag phase, simply because there was too much excitement after launch that the founders forgot what follows launch is tougher than the launch, or there was too much fear of what ensued after launch. Here is what causes the greatest failure for startup businesses or personal brands, either too much excitement or too much fear during initial stages, that very little actual work is done.

One of the biggest excuses that we have as business people is to accuse the governments of hindering our vision by delaying the process of registering businesses. But even then, when the registration is done, we ourselves refuse to work to actualize the vision we had. I agree that papers are important, but they are not the ones to do the growing for you. Sometimes we get scared about what will happen when we grow and have to rent a bigger office, pay more taxes, have to buy expensive equipment and so on and so forth. Interestingly, some of the things that we fear were once things that we adored, only that we doubted our ability to pursue them.

We all want to grow businesses that will employ thousands of people, but we fear how we shall be able to manage them. We all want to build estates, but we fear, what if we get half-way and run

out of money? We all want to study up to the PhD level, but we fear, what if things become tough and we cannot study anymore? Some of us want to venture into car and motorcycle racing, but we worry, what if we die in a competition? We want to study medicine, but we worry, what if that course becomes less marketable in a few years?

We all want to grow, but there is always something that keeps us away from this growth. If you can identify that particular thing and talk it out with an expert, you will go past the failing point of your business. If you let the fear of the unknown overwhelm your brand vision, you will go as far as nowhere, and I am sorry to say, you will go home poor, depressed and angry every day. I am not saying you will not face such worries, but when you do, how you handle it will determine if you are a winner or a loser.

Some people are scared that if they increase the quality of their products, they will have to increase their price, and this will mean loss of clients, yet that is a preconception that may or may not be accurate. Have you done it before and failed? It all depends on how such a change is executed. You can increase your price and still be the market leader. The idea I am putting across is that once you begin a brand, there is no room for backward movement, it is go go go.

41. Be consistent

Consistency is essential for achieving sustained success in business. It involves adhering to a clear vision and following standardized practices across all aspects of operations, branding, and customer interactions. Maintaining consistency helps build trust, enhances brand identity, and ensures that customers receive a reliable and predictable experience. To achieve this, businesses must focus on several key areas and implement effective models

and strategies.

The Brand Consistency Model is crucial for creating a recognizable and trustworthy brand. It emphasizes uniformity in visual elements, such as logos, color schemes, and messaging. By adhering to a set of brand guidelines, businesses can ensure that their brand remains cohesive across all marketing materials and customer touchpoints. Tools like brand guidelines and digital asset management systems play a vital role in maintaining this consistency, ensuring that every aspect of the brand is presented uniformly.

For operational consistency, adopting standardized processes is essential. Techniques such as Lean Six Sigma and Total Quality Management (TQM) focus on continuous improvement and process uniformity. Using process mapping tools and standard operating procedures (SOPs) can help ensure that tasks are performed consistently, leading to more efficient and reliable operations.

In the realm of digital content, utilizing a Content Management System (CMS) helps maintain consistency in content presentation and publication. Systems like WordPress or HubSpot offer features that allow businesses to manage and schedule content systematically. This ensures that updates are regular and aligned with the brand's guidelines, avoiding haphazard changes.

A Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system is also crucial for maintaining consistency in customer interactions. By centralizing customer data and tracking communications, CRMs ensure that every customer receives a uniform experience, regardless of which team member they interact with. This helps in delivering consistent service and building strong customer relationships.

Examining real-world examples highlights the importance of consistency. Jumia, a leading e-commerce platform in Africa, has demonstrated the power of consistent service. Despite facing various challenges, Jumia's unwavering focus on improving access to goods across the continent has led to a strong brand presence and market growth. Their consistent service delivery, logistics, and customer-centric policies have reinforced their reputation and trustworthiness.

In contrast, Huawei's experience underscores the risks associated with inconsistency. Initially successful in telecommunications, Huawei faced difficulties when it expanded aggressively into consumer electronics and other sectors. The rapid diversification without a clear, consistent strategy led to operational challenges and brand dilution. Inconsistent product quality and varied marketing strategies across regions caused confusion and impacted the brand's reputation, highlighting the risks of frequent strategic shifts.

To ensure consistency, businesses should develop a comprehensive brand style guide outlining visual and messaging standards. Implementing and adhering to standard operating procedures (SOPs) for critical processes is also essential. Using digital tools such as content management systems and customer relationship management systems can streamline operations and maintain uniform customer experiences. Regular monitoring and reviewing of business processes, branding, and content help identify and address inconsistencies. Continuous training and education for employees reinforce the importance of maintaining consistency and adhering to established standards.

42. Be constant

Once you start, don't run out of stock, and always be there. If

you are selling maize, ensure you have ways of getting that maize every time. If you are to be consistent, then you must be constant. The worst kind of frustration for a client is to find that their favorite joint is unexpectedly closed, or that it is open but lacks the product they are interested in. In order to win the minds and hearts of your clientele, you must learn to be available all the time, when you have promised to. Customers must be able to count on you. If you open on weekdays and Saturday up to noon, ensure your employees don't decide to close all day on Saturday just because you are out of town. Your services must be available at the time, otherwise, clients will soon realize they cannot count on you and they will go looking for a more reliable person to deal with.

If you are in the garbage collection industry, don't fail your clients. Have plans to ensure you have a plan B to ensure your clients are attended to, and if worse gets to worse, at least communicate to your clients of the changes or emergency. The reason you need to be constant is that clients plan themselves in such a way that they know a specific time is for transacting with you. So if you fail, you also fail their schedules.

43. Don't be a people pleaser

I was having a breakfast meeting with the C.E.O & Founder of Alzheimers & Dementia Organization Kenya, and as we were talking, she mentioned one statement that rings in my head to date. She said, 'Son, a tongue that has saliva will always speak'. Come to think of it, when you do something good, people speak about it, if you do something bad, they will still speak about it. Many times, we fail to pursue our dreams because we worry that people will speak ill against us. But let me tell you something, you will never succeed and please everyone. Those two things don't go together. You have to choose to either please everyone, or to succeed. If you choose to please everyone, lower your expectations, but if you

choose to succeed, ask people to lower their expectations of you, because you are likely to do things they will not be pleased with.

The pressure to please everyone is a topic of extensive discussion I have had with many leaders in my consulting career. There are people who are bound by the bondage of pleasing everyone around them. I have, myself, been a victim of the same. This is the worst form of bondage for any entrepreneur. When doing business, you will surely rub shoulders with either one person or the other. You may never please the law, please customers and meet your business dreams. You will have to strike a hard compromise. There are times you will have to hire the most unlikely candidate and rub shoulders with your HR, other times you will have to fire your best friend, you may also have to reprimand your most hardworking employee. You need to be yourself for your brand to grow. You simply cannot afford to be nice to everyone.

Because of the shoulders you rub, people will hate you, others will speak about you in the darkness and in the light. Learn to know when to tune out to a different frequency. When you hear people talk about you, know what to listen and what not to. Even if you listen to everything, know what to take seriously and what to ignore. You mustn't really have to take in everything that people say about you. Your vision will die young(er). Your brand will die young(er).

Pay attention to positive energy. Whatever does not build your brand, leave it. For your brand to grow, if haters attack you with unkind words, respond with love and maturity. If they post discouraging messages on your social media or call you with bitterness, respond with love and maturity. Define the boundary of how much negativity you are going to entertain. Focus on growing, and less on what haters say. Use negative criticism as the catalyst to change, and not as a ditch to fall into. If you do not learn how to

filter things out, you will sooner or later fall into depression for things that are not worth it.

Leadership requires authenticity, and being a people pleaser can hinder your effectiveness. Resist the urge to constantly seek approval, as leadership involves making tough decisions that may not always align with everyone's preferences. To break free from people-pleasing tendencies, start by clarifying your values and priorities. Establish a clear vision for your team and make decisions based on these principles rather than solely to appease others.

Set boundaries to prevent overcommitting and prioritize your team's collective goals over individual desires. Embrace constructive feedback, but avoid bending your leadership style to satisfy every opinion. By fostering a culture of open communication and standing firm in your convictions, you'll cultivate a more authentic leadership style that garners respect and trust from your team.

44. Differentiate leaders from followers

One of the quickest ways to experience frustration in business is to expect uniform behavior from everyone. Understanding the distinction between leaders and followers is crucial for success. Leaders and followers have fundamentally different roles and approaches. Leaders are adept at navigating challenges by creating innovative solutions and charting new paths, while followers thrive on existing methods and established guidelines. Leaders are driven by self-confidence and a pursuit of excellence, even in the face of uncertainty or opposition. In contrast, followers often concern themselves with how their actions are perceived by others and whether they are conforming to expectations.

This distinction becomes particularly important when selecting

team leaders for projects or company programs. If followers are placed in leadership roles, the result can be stagnation and mediocrity, as their inclination is to adhere to established routines rather than push for progress. Conversely, leaders drive constant innovation and growth. Choosing a leader based on personal relationships, such as appointing a relative who lacks leadership skills, can jeopardize your organization's potential. Similarly, placing an unqualified heir in a leadership position, simply because they are family, can lead to significant setbacks for your business.

It is essential to recognize that not everyone is suited to be a leader or a follower. Whether you believe leaders are born or made, if you plan to pass your business to an heir, it is vital to groom them into a leader, not just a follower. Effective leadership is dynamic and proactive. If your child is to inherit your business, start their training early. Engage them in the business environment from a young age to instill the values of leadership and responsibility. For instance, involving a young child in office activities can lay the groundwork for future leadership qualities. Observing your behavior as a leader and understanding how to manage people and make decisions will influence their development.

There are numerous examples where heirs, despite lacking technical expertise, have successfully led businesses to new heights. Successful leadership is often more about the ability to inspire and manage effectively than possessing technical knowledge alone. A highly educated heir with no leadership skills might not bring the same success as one who has been nurtured and trained in leadership from an early age. Therefore, the future of your business depends significantly on the leadership skills of your successors rather than just their educational qualifications.

45. Be slow to hire, quicker to fire

One common mistake entrepreneurs make is hiring too quickly and firing too slowly. This often results from an urgent need to fill positions or a reluctance to deal with underperformance, leading to the retention of individuals who may not be a good fit for the organization. This can significantly impact a startup's growth and stability.

Effective hiring requires a strategic approach. The Structured Interview Model, for instance, involves using a consistent set of questions for all candidates to evaluate them objectively. This model ensures that each candidate is assessed on the same criteria, reducing bias and improving the likelihood of finding the right fit. Additionally, the Job Fit Model assesses whether a candidate's skills and experiences align with the specific requirements of the job. This model involves analyzing the job's demands and comparing them with the candidate's qualifications and work history to ensure compatibility.

The use of pre-employment assessments, such as personality tests and cognitive ability tests, can further refine the hiring process. For example, the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) can help understand a candidate's personality traits and how they might fit within the team dynamics. Similarly, cognitive ability tests can evaluate problem-solving skills and learning potential, which are crucial for roles requiring rapid adaptation and critical thinking.

Firing decisions should also be managed carefully to avoid negative repercussions. The Progressive Discipline Model is effective in this regard, offering a structured approach to addressing performance issues. This model includes initial informal discussions, followed by formal written warnings and performance improvement plans before considering termination. It

provides employees with clear feedback and opportunities to improve their performance, ensuring that firing decisions are well-documented and fair.

Handling terminations with professionalism is crucial. The Fairness Model suggests that terminations should be conducted transparently, with clear communication about the reasons for dismissal and the steps that led to this decision. Providing severance packages and outplacement support can also help maintain a positive reputation and facilitate a smoother transition for the employee.

The practical application of these models can be seen in notable case studies. In Kenya, a significant issue arose with a large telecommunications company that experienced operational difficulties due to poor hiring practices. The company's rapid expansion led to the recruitment of individuals who did not align with the company's values or culture. This misalignment caused high turnover rates and operational inefficiencies, ultimately affecting the company's performance and stability. In another example, a major retail chain in Africa faced substantial challenges due to its hasty expansion across the continent. The company's rushed hiring process resulted in numerous managerial issues, as many new hires were not equipped to handle the demands of the fast-paced retail environment. This oversight led to operational disruptions and financial losses, illustrating the impact of poor hiring decisions on a company's success.

When it comes to business, don't compromise on delivery. Don't defend and brood someone who is not worth, and is not even trying to be. You can be patient with someone who is trying, but also don't let them fool you into waiting forever.

46. Solve conflicts early

Handling conflicts early is essential for maintaining a positive work environment and ensuring that teams stay focused and productive. Ignoring conflicts can lead to dissatisfaction and hinder teamwork, making it crucial for leaders to address issues promptly. Leaders who are attentive to their team's dynamics and quick to resolve disputes demonstrate a commitment to the well-being of their employees and the overall health of the organization.

To effectively manage conflicts, start by fostering an open and transparent communication culture. Encourage team members to voice their concerns early and create a safe space for dialogue. This proactive approach allows issues to be addressed before they escalate, minimizing disruptions and maintaining team cohesion. Implement regular check-ins and feedback sessions to identify and resolve potential conflicts early, before they impact team performance.

Utilize conflict resolution models to guide your approach. The Thomas-Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument, for example, identifies five conflict-handling styles: competing, collaborating, compromising, avoiding, and accommodating. Each style represents a different approach to managing and resolving conflicts, and understanding these can help leaders choose the most effective strategy based on the situation and the individuals involved.

Competing is a style characterized by assertiveness and a desire to win the conflict, often at the expense of others. Leaders who adopt this style prioritize their own needs and goals over those of the other party. While this approach can be effective in situations requiring quick, decisive action or when standing firm is essential, it can also create resentment and hinder long-term relationships if overused. Competing is best suited for high-stakes

scenarios where a firm stance is necessary, but it should be balanced with an awareness of its potential impact on team dynamics.

Collaborating involves a high level of assertiveness and cooperation, with the goal of finding a win-win solution that satisfies all parties involved. This style encourages open communication, active listening, and creative problem-solving to address the underlying issues of the conflict. Collaborating is particularly effective for complex issues where input from multiple perspectives is valuable, and it helps build strong, respectful relationships. However, this approach can be time-consuming and may not always be feasible in situations requiring immediate resolution.

Compromising seeks a middle ground where each party gives up something to reach a mutually acceptable solution. This style is characterized by moderate assertiveness and cooperation, aiming for a practical resolution that partially satisfies both sides. Compromising is useful for addressing less critical issues or when time constraints necessitate a quick resolution. While it can be effective in balancing competing interests, it may result in a solution that leaves all parties somewhat dissatisfied if not carefully managed.

Avoiding is a style where individuals sidestep or withdraw from the conflict, either by postponing it or ignoring it altogether. This approach is characterized by low assertiveness and low cooperation. Avoiding can be useful in situations where the conflict is minor, or when addressing it would be counterproductive. However, frequent avoidance can lead to unresolved issues festering and impacting team morale and productivity. It is best used sparingly and in scenarios where the conflict is unlikely to affect the overall goals or relationships significantly.

Accommodating involves putting the needs and desires of others before one's own, prioritizing harmony and relationship preservation over personal concerns. This style is characterized by high cooperation and low assertiveness. Accommodating can be effective when the issue is of low importance to oneself but crucial to others, helping to maintain positive relationships and demonstrate goodwill. However, consistently accommodating others can lead to personal dissatisfaction and the feeling of being undervalued if not balanced with one's own needs.

When conflicts arise, address them promptly by gathering all relevant information and listening to each party's perspective. This helps in understanding the root cause of the issue and finding a fair resolution. Develop a clear plan for resolving the conflict, outlining the steps to be taken and the expected outcomes. Communicate this plan effectively to all parties involved to ensure clarity and agreement.

After resolving the conflict, follow up to ensure that the solution is effective and that the issue has been fully addressed. Monitor the team's dynamics to prevent similar problems from recurring and to reinforce a culture of open communication and respect. By taking these practical steps and applying conflict resolution models, leaders can maintain a harmonious work environment, enhance team performance, and contribute to the overall success of the organization.

47. Invest in volunteer programs

When launching a new venture from the ground up, leveraging the support of volunteers is vital for gaining initial momentum. Volunteers can come from various sources, including family, friends, or even individuals who align with your vision. In the early stages of a business, where immediate financial returns may

be limited, volunteers offer invaluable assistance, allowing you to concentrate on building your brand without the burden of financial pressures.

To effectively utilize volunteers, start by clearly defining the roles and responsibilities you need assistance with. This ensures that both you and the volunteers have a mutual understanding of their contributions and the expectations involved. Establishing clear boundaries and guidelines helps in maintaining professionalism, even when working with friends or family. It's essential to create a positive and respectful work environment, as volunteers are investing their time and energy without monetary compensation.

Recognize and appreciate the efforts of your volunteers consistently. This can be achieved through regular acknowledgment of their contributions, providing constructive feedback, and creating opportunities for them to see the impact of their work on the brand's development. Even though you might not be able to offer financial rewards initially, fostering a motivational atmosphere and showing genuine gratitude can go a long way in retaining their support and enthusiasm.

Set up a structured plan for managing volunteers, including defining their roles, expectations, and any boundaries regarding their involvement. This helps in ensuring that their contributions align with your brand's goals and avoids potential conflicts or misunderstandings. Regular communication is key—keep volunteers informed about the progress of the venture and how their work is contributing to its success.

By implementing these practical steps and maintaining a respectful and appreciative attitude, you can effectively harness the power of volunteers to propel your new venture forward, while building a strong foundation for future growth.

48. Separate business and personal finances

Effectively separating personal and business finances is a fundamental practice that ensures financial transparency, accurate record-keeping, and the overall financial integrity of both personal and professional spheres. Implementing this principle starts with establishing distinct financial entities for each domain. Opening a dedicated business checking account and securing a business credit card exclusively for company-related expenses are crucial steps. Concurrently, a personal checking account should be maintained for individual income and expenditures, clearly delineating between the two.

A critical next step is setting a clearly defined salary or draw for personal use. This approach not only helps in maintaining a clear distinction between personal and business funds but also supports effective personal budgeting, ensuring that business resources are allocated appropriately. Adhering to this structured approach prevents the commingling of financial resources, which is a common pitfall that can jeopardize both personal and business financial health. It is essential to use business accounts and credit cards solely for company-related transactions, avoiding the use of personal financial instruments for business purposes. Equally important is resisting the temptation to access business funds for personal expenses, as this can lead to financial confusion and potential legal complications.

Regular reconciliation of both personal and business accounts is a non-negotiable practice that ensures ongoing financial clarity. Consistently monitoring and categorizing income and expenditures for each account, ideally with the help of accounting software or financial tools, helps maintain meticulous records. This diligent practice not only enhances financial transparency but also simplifies tax reporting by clearly distinguishing between personal

and business transactions, thereby reducing the complexities that can arise from intertwined financial activities.

If employees are involved, it is vital to educate and train them on the importance of maintaining this separation. Clearly communicating the distinction between personal and business finances helps avoid confusion and inadvertent mix-ups, thereby fostering a culture of financial responsibility within the organization. This comprehensive approach to separating finances ultimately contributes to the long-term success and stability of both personal and business financial endeavors.

49. Stay humble in success and gracious in failure

Embracing humility in success and displaying graciousness in failure is a profound leadership philosophy that plays a critical role in the business world. When leaders maintain humility in success, they acknowledge that achievements are rarely the result of their efforts alone. Instead, they recognize the contributions of their team, the support of their stakeholders, and often the favorable circumstances that allowed for success. This kind of humility fosters an environment of gratitude and collaboration, where individuals feel valued and motivated to continue contributing their best efforts. Leaders who embody this principle inspire a culture of continuous improvement and prevent the complacency that can come with success.

A compelling example of this philosophy in action is the story of Adidas, particularly under the leadership of its former CEO, Kasper Rørsted. Adidas has experienced significant highs and lows in its history, and the company's response to these fluctuations exemplifies the power of humility and grace in leadership. During the early 2000s, Adidas was struggling to compete with its major rival, Nike, which had a dominant position in the global sportswear market. Adidas was seen as lagging behind, particularly in the U.S.

market, where Nike's presence was overwhelming.

When Kasper Rørsted took the helm in 2016, he approached the situation with humility, acknowledging that Adidas needed to rethink its strategies and rebuild its brand presence. Instead of being discouraged by the challenges, Rørsted and his team embraced them as opportunities for growth. They initiated a series of strategic changes, including a renewed focus on innovation, a stronger push into the digital realm, and a commitment to sustainability, which resonated with a new generation of consumers. Throughout this period of transformation, Rørsted emphasized the importance of teamwork and collective effort, ensuring that the successes were shared across the company.

However, success did not lead to complacency. Even as Adidas began to regain market share and increase its profitability, Rørsted remained focused on continuous improvement. The company did not rest on its laurels but instead pushed forward with new initiatives, such as expanding into emerging markets and further enhancing its e-commerce capabilities. This humility in the face of success allowed Adidas to sustain its momentum and continue growing, rather than falling into the trap of complacency.

Balancing humility in success and grace in failure is crucial for maintaining a stable and resilient leadership approach. One of the key steps to achieving this balance is maintaining a mindset of learning and growth. Leaders should view both successes and failures as opportunities to learn and improve, rather than as endpoints. By fostering a culture that values learning, leaders can ensure that their teams remain adaptable and open to new ideas, regardless of the circumstances. This approach not only helps in keeping the organization grounded but also encourages innovation and creativity.

Another important step is to regularly seek feedback and

remain open to criticism. Humble leaders are those who actively listen to their teams, customers, and stakeholders, and use the insights gained to refine their strategies and approaches. By being receptive to feedback, leaders can better understand the areas where they can improve, whether in times of success or failure. This openness also builds trust within the organization, as employees feel that their voices are heard and valued.

Additionally, it is essential for leaders to celebrate team achievements and share credit with those who contributed to success. This not only reinforces the collaborative nature of success but also helps to distribute the recognition across the organization, preventing any single individual from becoming overly self-assured. Similarly, when failures occur, leaders should take responsibility and focus on what can be learned from the experience. By doing so, they demonstrate resilience and a commitment to continuous improvement, setting an example for the rest of the organization to follow.

Adidas' journey under Kasper Rørsted's leadership illustrates how staying humble in success and gracious in failure can drive a company toward long-term growth and sustainability. Leaders who adopt this approach not only strengthen their organizations but also create a culture where success is celebrated collectively and failures are viewed as valuable learning experiences. This mindset not only defines authentic leadership but also ensures that the organization remains adaptable, innovative, and resilient in a constantly changing business environment.

50. Develop effective SOPs

To ensure smooth and consistent operations, it's vital to develop and adhere to well-defined Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) that outline the specifics of each process, including what

needs to be done, how it should be done, and when it should take place. These procedures are the backbone of operational efficiency, minimizing the risk of inconsistencies, such as lapses in service or variations in customer interaction. For example, without SOPs, tasks like table cleaning might be overlooked, or employees might fail to greet customers appropriately, leading to a disjointed experience.

Well-crafted SOPs serve as a comprehensive guide, directing every aspect of the workflow to ensure that operations proceed smoothly from start to finish. By prominently displaying these procedures, businesses establish a clear sense of order and authority at every interaction point between clients and employees. This not only promotes uniformity but also instills confidence in both employees and customers, as everyone understands what is expected.

It's important to note that implementing SOPs does not mean stripping employees of their individuality or turning them into automatons. Rather, SOPs provide a structured framework within which employees can operate consistently while still allowing for personal expression and flexibility where appropriate. This organized approach not only streamlines workflows but also creates an environment where efficiency thrives, ultimately enhancing the overall customer experience. Through the careful design and application of SOPs, businesses can achieve a harmonious balance between consistency and human touch, leading to greater customer satisfaction and operational success.

51. Know your legal arena

Navigating the legal landscape is crucial for business leaders to ensure compliance and protect their organizations from potential legal challenges. This requires a comprehensive and proactive

approach. First, business leaders must thoroughly understand the legal requirements specific to their industry and geographic location. This includes staying informed about relevant regulations, licensing requirements, and compliance standards. For instance, a company operating in the healthcare industry needs to be aware of regulations related to patient privacy, data protection, and healthcare standards, while a business in the financial sector must comply with stringent financial regulations and anti-money laundering laws.

To stay ahead of potential legal issues, it's essential to engage in continuous learning and keep up with changes in laws and regulations. Regularly attending industry seminars, subscribing to legal updates, and participating in professional associations can help leaders stay informed about new legal developments that may impact their business.

Proactively seeking legal counsel is another critical component of navigating the legal landscape. Establishing a strong relationship with a qualified attorney who understands the intricacies of your industry can provide invaluable guidance on legal matters. This relationship should go beyond just handling crises; it should involve regular consultations to assess potential risks and liabilities, ensuring that the business is always prepared to address any legal challenges that may arise. For example, a startup entering into new markets might seek legal advice to navigate international trade laws, intellectual property rights, and tax obligations.

Regular legal audits and compliance checks are essential for identifying areas that need attention or adjustment. These audits can uncover potential legal vulnerabilities, such as outdated contracts, non-compliance with new regulations, or weaknesses in data protection practices. By addressing these issues promptly, businesses can mitigate risks before they escalate into costly legal

disputes.

Business leaders should also prioritize the creation and maintenance of legally sound contracts and agreements. Whether dealing with clients, vendors, or employees, clear and enforceable contracts are essential to protecting the business's interests. For example, when entering into a partnership with a new supplier, a well-drafted contract can outline the terms of the agreement, payment schedules, delivery timelines, and penalties for non-compliance. This not only ensures that both parties have a clear understanding of their obligations but also provides a legal framework for resolving disputes if they arise.

In addition to contracts, business leaders must ensure that company policies and procedures are legally compliant. This includes everything from employment policies to data protection protocols. For instance, in light of increasing data privacy concerns, businesses must implement robust data protection measures to comply with laws such as the data protection act in Kenya, General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) in Europe or the California Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA) in the United States. Non-compliance with such regulations can result in significant fines and damage to the company's reputation.

In the end, understanding the legal landscape involves a commitment to continuous education, strategic partnerships with legal professionals, and meticulous attention to legal details. This proactive and informed approach to legal matters, helps business leaders to safeguard their organizations against potential legal challenges and ensure long-term success.

52. Automate what can be automated

Automation in new businesses involves the integration of technology to streamline processes, enhance efficiency, and drive

overall growth. For leadership, the primary advantage of automation is the ability to delegate routine tasks to technology, freeing up time for strategic decision-making and innovation. For example, instead of spending hours on manual data entry or routine follow-ups, leaders can focus on long-term planning and building company culture. In marketing, automation tools can take over repetitive tasks such as social media scheduling, email campaigns, and lead generation, ensuring consistent brand presence and targeted customer engagement. This not only saves time but also allows for more precise marketing strategies tailored to customer behavior.

The impact of automation extends beyond leadership and marketing; it can transform entire workflows, minimize errors, and significantly boost productivity. For instance, in operations, automation can handle inventory management, order processing, and even customer service through chatbots, all of which contribute to reducing operational costs and improving overall business efficiency. The appeal of automation is particularly strong for new businesses with limited resources, as it offers the potential for growth without necessarily requiring substantial capital investment.

However, the process of automation should be approached in phases to maximize its benefits while mitigating potential drawbacks. The first phase typically involves identifying the most time-consuming and repetitive tasks that can be automated. For a small business, this might include automating social media posting, email marketing, or basic data entry using low-cost or free tools. For example, tools like Hootsuite for social media management or Mailchimp for email marketing offer scalable solutions that small businesses can afford, allowing them to automate critical functions without breaking the bank.

The next phase often includes leveraging cloud-based services

that offer scalable automation solutions. This approach allows businesses to pay only for the services they use, making automation accessible even with limited capital. For example, platforms such as Odoo and Amazon Web Services (AWS) provides scalable cloud-based solutions that can grow with the business, ensuring that companies only pay for what they need at any given time. Additionally, businesses might invest in customer relationship management (CRM) systems that automate customer interactions and data management, providing valuable insights without requiring a large upfront investment.

While the advantages of automation are clear, there are important considerations to keep in mind. One of the main challenges is ensuring that the workforce is adequately trained to adapt to new automated processes. Without proper training, employees might struggle with new technologies, leading to decreased productivity and morale. Additionally, businesses must be cautious of over-automation, where excessive reliance on technology could lead to a loss of personal touch with customers, potentially damaging the brand's reputation.

An example of a company that successfully leveraged automation is Netflix. Initially, Netflix started as a DVD rental service, but through strategic phases of automation, it transformed into the streaming giant we know today. Netflix automated its recommendation engine, which is crucial for personalizing the user experience. By using algorithms to analyze viewing habits and suggest content, Netflix significantly enhanced customer satisfaction and engagement, leading to increased subscriber growth. However, Netflix also faced challenges, such as the need to continually update and improve its algorithms to stay ahead of competitors and maintain customer loyalty.

While automation offers numerous advantages such as improved efficiency, reduced operational costs, and the ability to

scale, it also requires careful planning and execution. Businesses must consider the phases of automation, starting with the most impactful areas and gradually expanding, all while ensuring their teams are equipped to handle the transition. By strategically implementing automation, new businesses can not only enhance their operational efficiency but also position themselves for long-term success in a competitive market.

53. Take care of your brand reputation

The image you create for your brand directly shapes its reputation, and this can have a lasting impact on how customers perceive and interact with your business. If your brand is known for slow responses or poor customer service, you risk being seen as a company that doesn't value its clientele. Just as in personal relationships, it's the small, everyday actions that contribute to the overall impression people have of you. In business, this means every interaction, no matter how minor, contributes to the image your brand projects. "You never get a second chance to make a first impression" is a quote that resonates deeply in the business world. Some customers may be forgiving and willing to overlook a misstep if you handle it well, but not everyone will give you that opportunity. For some, one poor experience is all it takes to form a lasting negative opinion.

In a competitive landscape where even the smallest details can influence customer perceptions, it's crucial to focus on the little things that can affect your brand's reputation. For example, something as seemingly insignificant as an employee wearing a torn shirt can alter a customer's view of your business, making them question your attention to detail and professionalism. I've experienced this firsthand when walking into a restaurant only to leave shortly after because no one bothered to greet me or take my order in a timely manner. That lack of basic etiquette left a

negative impression that overshadowed any potential positives the restaurant might have offered.

The small courtesies and mannerisms your employees exhibit when dealing with customers or even each other play a critical role in how your brand is perceived. Investing in the training and development of these soft skills is not just a nicety but a necessity for maintaining a strong brand reputation. There are countless brands whose enduring success can be attributed largely to the reputation they have meticulously built over time. This reputation becomes a form of goodwill that can sustain customer loyalty for years, if not decades.

From the very beginning, it's essential to cultivate behaviors and practices that consistently present your brand in a positive light. Never underestimate the importance of tightening up those small, seemingly insignificant loose ends, because they could be the very things that make or break a customer's experience. One day, you might encounter a customer who is particularly sensitive to those details, and if you haven't addressed them, it could cost you not only that customer but also the valuable word-of-mouth they could have provided. Every detail, every interaction, every decision matters. By being proactive and attentive to the small things, you can build a reputation that not only attracts customers but also keeps them coming back.

54. Stop waiting for external approval

The biggest obstacle to your success is often the doubt that you are not the best at what you do. This doubt can silently erode your potential from within. New brands often face skepticism and ridicule, with the fear of failure looming large. It's crucial for founders and entrepreneurs to be self-aware and resilient, tuning out the noise of discouragement. When you step into the business

world, if you know what you're doing, ignore the negative energy and focus your thoughts on positivity.

One of the most common and damaging thoughts we encounter is the belief that we are not good enough. Whether you're starting a bakery, launching a security firm, renting an office space, or writing a book, there will always seem to be someone better, someone with more experience or resources. This can be incredibly daunting. But here's the truth: you are more than capable, and you are exactly what your venture needs right now. Stop worrying about being good enough, because if it's your time to act, then you are absolutely ready for it.

Success doesn't require the approval of others—it starts with your belief in yourself. While feedback is valuable for growth, waiting for others' approval can slow you down significantly. The only validation you truly need is from within; everything else should be seen as constructive feedback to help you on your journey. You are capable of achieving great things, but it requires unwavering determination and self-belief.

Our minds can be our greatest adversaries, often convincing us that we lack the skills or potential to excel. Many of us have untapped potential that we don't recognize in ourselves, even when those around us see it clearly. If you've ever dismissed a compliment as flattery, you may have overlooked your true abilities. Often, the fear of inadequacy holds us back from pursuing opportunities, even when we have everything it takes to succeed. We must learn to believe in ourselves and recognize that we are indeed good enough.

No matter the challenges you face, you have the ability to achieve your goals if you commit to them. History is full of inspiring stories of people who defied the odds to make a significant impact. You could be the next success story, but it starts

with overcoming the fear that holds you back and believing in your brand. Cultivate a winning mindset, not just in yourself, but in your team as well. Inspire your employees with your vision and passion, and together, you can achieve remarkable things. But it all begins with changing your mindset to one of positive thinking and self-belief.

As I mentioned in my book *A Becomer's Philosophy*, when you embark on a journey, you are the only one who truly understands your vision. The motivation that fueled your start should never fade. Stay focused, no matter what others say or how they try to discourage you. There will always be people who don't want you to succeed, whether out of malice, jealousy, or personal vendettas. Learn when to stop listening to these voices. You are perfectly suited for the path you've chosen. Keep believing, keep fighting, and don't stop until you've achieved your goals.

55. Never be a little too comfortable

As founders, it's crucial to recognize the tendency to become complacent after achieving initial milestones. This comfort can set in as soon as we experience early successes, but it's important to understand that substantial progress still lies ahead. In the early stages of building a brand, the primary focus is often on establishing market presence and gaining recognition. However, as the brand evolves, the ambition to become a leading or exclusive player in the industry intensifies. This heightened ambition demands a sustained and strategic effort, as competition continuously evolves and becomes more aggressive.

Achieving initial success should not lead to complacency. In a competitive landscape, where market dynamics are constantly shifting, maintaining vigilance is essential. Founders must be adept at market analysis, regularly evaluating competitor strategies, and

adapting to emerging trends. The failure to do so can result in losing competitive advantage and relevance. Implementing frameworks such as SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) and PESTLE analysis (Political, Economic, Social, Technological, Legal, Environmental) can help identify areas for improvement and opportunities for growth.

It's important to distinguish between contentment and complacency. Contentment involves recognizing and appreciating the progress made while remaining motivated to achieve further goals. Complacency, on the other hand, can lead to stagnation. To prevent this, set clear, measurable objectives for continued growth and innovation. Regularly review and adjust business strategies to align with evolving market conditions and consumer preferences. This might involve investing in new technologies, expanding product lines, or enhancing customer engagement strategies.

Ensuring operational efficiency is another key aspect. Implementing performance metrics and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) helps monitor progress and identify areas that need attention. Tools such as balanced scorecards and continuous improvement methodologies (like Lean or Six Sigma) can be valuable in streamlining operations and enhancing productivity.

Even after reaching significant milestones, the journey is far from over. It's important to sustain momentum by fostering a culture of innovation and resilience within the team. Encourage continuous learning and professional development, and remain agile in responding to market changes. This might include adopting agile project management techniques or exploring emerging business models.

Avoiding stagnation requires a proactive approach. Establish regular feedback loops with customers and stakeholders to gather insights and refine your offerings. Additionally, keeping an eye on

industry advancements and integrating relevant trends into your strategy ensures that the business remains at the forefront of innovation.

In summary, while it's essential to celebrate achievements and take necessary breaks, founders must maintain a balance between contentment and ongoing effort. Use strategic tools and methodologies to continuously assess and improve business operations. Staying vigilant and adaptable ensures that initial successes translate into sustained growth and long-term success. Always remember, progress demands ongoing commitment and the ability to evolve with the market.

56. Cross bridges when you get there

One huge mistake that we often make, speaking to myself and my brands, is that we tend to cross bridges/ foresee barriers through our imaginations rather than physically, so most of our potentials are choked before actualization. Many are the times when incredible start-up ideas, many development plans are crashed by the imagination that we cannot make it because we do not have this or that. Many are the times when we fail to pursue important dreams that can actually make us successful, simply because we tend to convince ourselves that we cannot. As such, there are many great ideas that have not been tried, but have been extensively thought through.

I wonder what makes us cross bridges even before we get to them. We so often make up bridges and cross them in our imaginations, even when such bridges do not exist in reality, and this is a major hindrance to positive progress in our brands and our lives. We often convince ourselves that we cannot grow our brands to double-profits because we do not have the capital needed. We often tell ourselves that we will not submit a proposal to an

investor because most investors prefer companies with a history of success. We often tell ourselves we will not get a business loan because the market is already flooded, so we will not succeed if we pick the loan. Sometimes, there are totally no bridges where we create them, and the ones that exist are probably not too high to hinder our success, but unless you hold on and find out the actual nature of the bridge, or if there is one in the first place, your success will never go past imagination.

In my book, *A Becomer's Philosophy*, I wrote extensively about the importance of daring. To create a brand that will go past the 7 years mark, you must be crazy enough to do things, and one day one time, you will realize all the hindrances to your success were just in your head and not in the real world. Never give up too easily or too quickly to fail to reach your purpose in life. Refuse to create bridges in your imagination, prepare well, and wait until you get to the bridge so you can know whether it exists in the first place, and how high it is. And remember, we are different, so don't copy me. Look for your own unique calling and do it as you are led. You can be unique and successful, or you can be a troubled copycat. Copy what is good in me, but don't try to become me, because you will not, and it will cause you life-long frustrations.

57. Stop the show, start working

Many businesses, especially in this age of social media boom and consequent addiction are baseless. There are businesses that thrive on social media propaganda. Instead of doing real things, there are businesses that have only been posting quotes and pictures for the past 6 months without actually doing any tangible work. It is not bad in its entirety, as it is critical to marketing, but when substituted for work, it is lethal, equated to building castles on air. There are brands whose only positive progress is getting their registration papers, posting a few selfies and making business

cards.

My dear friends, building a brand takes more than just having a highly active social media presence. Don't get me wrong, you need to have a social media presence, but surely, that cannot be the only thing your brand has been doing since launch. You need to go out there and do actual tangible things. You need to be seen making those water bottles you registered your business so you could make. If you started an NGO, don't thrive on social media only so your friends and peers can see, go out there and do real things. If you began an online clothes store, import clothes and post pictures of them, not motivational quotes day-in-day-out.

Stop sharing pictures of things you don't have so the world can see and think you are doing well. I know you probably have had to fake it till you make it, but be realistic in doing so. Don't go making business cards to feel like you are making progress while you are not. Face reality. Live in reality. Go out there and make your vision real. Printing business cards, getting team t-shirts, an active social media profile is not all it takes to build a brand.

Fold your sleeves and do real things. Start making those videos, start playing that music instrument or teach others how to, start baking those cakes, start selling those farm products. Just don't lie to yourself by keeping an active social media profile for your business while in the real sense you are doing nothing on the ground. You still have time, sit down today and strategize. Make a real impact.

In the world today, there are many companies, especially those run by millennials that thrive on tweeting and retweeting and some little hullabaloo on Instagram, and that's it. Where did the people who used to work hard go? You will find a company that was formed, then the founders parted ways because of frustrations, and instead of rebuilding, they have majored on building castles on

social media. There are companies where 75% of the activity is about posting things for their audience to appreciate, but most of those things are not an actual activity that the company is carrying out in the field.

We need to stop lying to ourselves that social media is the lifeline of our brands, well, at least not without active real and true operations on the ground. Customers do not want to see those memes and links you share about other people's success, unless that is what your brand is about. Otherwise, if your brand is not a news agency, get down to real work and begin posting pictures and links of real work you are doing on the ground. We shall be happy and laugh at all those motivational links and stories you are sharing, but that will not make us trust you, neither give you business, and may not put food on your table. What will earn you our trust is to see the real things you are doing out there on the ground.

58. Seek feedback about your leadership

Seeking feedback about your leadership is essential for both personal and professional growth. To begin this process, start by fostering an environment that encourages open and honest communication. Clearly communicate to your team that you are open to receiving feedback and that their opinions are highly valued. This can be done by setting up regular one-on-one meetings, team discussions, or using anonymous feedback tools such as surveys or suggestion boxes.

Be specific in your feedback requests. Ask targeted questions about areas you feel need improvement, such as decision-making, communication skills, or team motivation. For example, you might ask, "How can I improve my communication with the team?" or "What can I do to better support your professional development?"

This helps your team provide more actionable and relevant feedback.

To ensure that feedback is genuine and constructive, cultivate a culture of trust and transparency. Assure your team that all feedback is welcomed and that it will be used constructively without any negative consequences for them. Encourage open dialogue by showing appreciation for the feedback given, and actively listen without becoming defensive. Show that you value their perspectives by asking follow-up questions to gain a deeper understanding of their points.

Once you have gathered feedback, take actionable steps to address the areas for improvement. Develop a plan to implement the suggestions and share your progress with your team to demonstrate that their feedback is leading to tangible changes. For instance, if feedback indicates a need for better project management, consider adopting new tools or techniques to improve organization and communication. Additionally, seek out feedback from a variety of sources, including peers, subordinates, and mentors, to gain a comprehensive view of your leadership effectiveness. Participate in leadership development programs or workshops, and consider working with a coach or mentor who can provide ongoing guidance and support.

By creating a structured feedback loop and consistently acting on the insights gathered, you foster a culture of growth and continuous improvement. This not only strengthens your leadership skills but also demonstrates a commitment to personal development and team success.

59. Understand growth is a journey

Growth is often gradual rather than immediate. While some may see rapid progress, others might need years to achieve their

goals. Success doesn't always come overnight. It's crucial to remain patient and persistent in pursuit of your vision, even when progress seems slow. Challenges are inevitable, and moments of doubt will arise, but perseverance is key. If you quit when faced with difficulties, you risk falling into a cycle of starting and abandoning new ventures. Instead, cultivate the resilience to endure through tough times.

Understand that there's a significant difference between genuine failure and a mere test of patience. True success is often the result of sustained effort, not shortcuts. Quick fixes or unscrupulous methods might seem tempting but can lead to dissatisfaction. Be prepared for periods of inactivity and remain steadfast in your commitment. Trust that with patience and hard work, your efforts will eventually yield results. Your perseverance will ultimately be rewarded, and your dedication will bring about the success you seek.

60. Let's meet for lesson 60 in volume 2

It has been a pleasure having come all this way together. Let's meet again in volume 2 of this series. Until then, stay safe.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Tim Mwangi is an entrepreneur, strategy and management consultant, and a student of the principles of psychology. Tim Mwangi studied a graduate business degree in Master of Business Administration in the University of Nairobi, and has extensive expert experience in the strategy and management field. Passionate for writing and reading, it's my greatest desire to interact with you in this channel of communication, hoping this interaction bears fruit by transforming not just your life, but mine too.