

HoustonSuccess

Issue 2

MAGAZINE

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Welcome,

Hello and welcome to the second edition of *Houston Success Magazine*. We have so much to share with you this issue.

As many of you know, October is Cybersecurity Awareness Month. To celebrate, we are urging readers to review cybersecurity risks with your IT provider and to purchase a cyber liability policy that will protect you in the event of an attack. At Braintek, we recognize that the cybersecurity landscape has gotten worse over the past several years, and we are working hard to keep you secure as we combat new tactics and AI-enhanced attacks.

As a child, I loved computers. I really enjoyed tinkering with, configuring, and setting them up. My first computer didn't work out of the box, so I needed to go through a lot of trial and error to learn how to use it. I realized then I wanted to pursue it as a career and later appreciated the potential I had to support and help businesses grow using information technology.

Throughout this issue, you'll find insightful articles that include actionable advice from business leaders and thought innovators across several industries. First, real estate extraordinaire Barbara Corcoran shares her life experiences and the resulting entrepreneurial expertise that catapulted her to her status today as the queen of New York real estate. Next, best-selling author John C. Maxwell discusses the laws of leadership, including the critical components of successful businesses and what it takes to build and maintain a top-notch team. World-renowned entrepreneur Verne Harnish breaks down his Rockefeller Habits Checklist and explains how a healthy business starts with an aligned executive team and clearly prioritized goals. And lastly, on page 15, We review some software options conducive to business growth and some to avoid. You'll also get our take on AI tech tools when to use them, and when to go manual.

Our business is using concepts like these to grow alongside you. In addition to the exciting office expansion we told you about last issue, we have another significant change underway: the replacement of our in-house Workorders ticketing system with a cutting-edge industry solution, Kaseya's Autotask. This strategic shift promises to catapult



our services to new heights, granting us enhanced visibility, streamlined tracking, and access to invaluable resources that will significantly elevate our support process.

In addition, we have invested substantially in a sophisticated automated system for deploying software to your workstations and servers. Our meticulously crafted scripts resolve common support issues seamlessly, reducing issues and accelerating support procedures.

We have also been actively testing systems designed to streamline employee onboarding and termination. Should you be interested in participating in testing these systems, we warmly welcome your involvement.

In closing, Braintek's journey of growth and innovation throughout the year has been truly remarkable. Embracing automation remains at the core of our strategic vision, and we will persistently seek opportunities to leverage technology for the greater benefit of our clients' businesses.

This magazine is designed to be an avenue for business owners to learn new things or to come back to concepts you may not have heard about for a while. We are genuinely grateful for your readership and continued support, and we look forward to contributing to your future success. ■

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**SALES AND
INNOVATION
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CELEBRITY
SHARK**

MEET BARBARA!



**Sales And
Innovation
Secrets From
Celebrity Shark**

**BARBARA
CORCORAN**



Barbara Corcoran can still remember many of the sweat-inducing moments in her climb to becoming the Queen of New York Real Estate. Business leaders looked to her as someone with a mind for sales-focused growth and innovation, while Corcoran claims she used childhood lessons from her Irish-Catholic parents and a competitive spirit spurred on by insults and undiagnosed dyslexia to push herself to innovative ideas that would serve as her lifeline.

Whatever the case, something worked for the self-made millionaire who transformed herself from waitress to business powerhouse.

Corcoran has faced many recessions during her decades-long rise to the top of New York City's real estate market, and whenever the challenges seemed unrelenting, she always had an idea to surge her company, Corcoran Group, forward.

Says Corcoran: "I don't think you can sharpshoot in business. I think you have to throw a heck of a lot on the wall and see what sticks. If we could all sharpshoot, we could all be geniuses. A lot of stuff didn't stick, [but] I was willing to keep going and going."

Her success was founded in the roots of her family's small home, where she shared a room with her five sisters. Later, it was ignited by a former business partner turned ex-boyfriend. With many dips in the market, Barbara still managed to sell Corcoran Group for \$66 million, and she continues her business ventures through ABC's "Shark Tank." Corcoran has invested in more than 80 businesses, books and talk shows, and she gladly shares her expertise with fledgling entrepreneurs whose shoes she once shakily stood in.

Corcoran recently discussed her climb. From a communal sock drawer with her siblings to a \$10-million penthouse overlooking the very home she grew up in and the city she dominated, she shares her secrets with readers.

Corcoran's unique sales tactics and "throw everything at the wall" attitude positioned her real estate company in the best spot for a future acquisition, and her legacy continues with the group's ever-expanding national influence. For business owners and leaders in need of a jump-start for their sales team and a foundation on which to build a legacy, Corcoran's experiences and expertise can serve as a guide to lasting success.

FROM PIGTAILS TO THE CROWN

As her class took turns reading aloud, Corcoran could feel the pit in her stomach grow. She was just a kid, but it seemed like everyone else her age knew how to read. It was like deciphering a code for Corcoran, who was called "stupid" by one of the nuns at her Catholic school in seventh grade because she couldn't read.

Later, Corcoran was diagnosed with dyslexia, but in school, she maintained a D- average and mastered observation. Bubbly and expressive, Corcoran has always had a way with people, and she used these skills to learn about her surroundings and watch to see if people noticed she was struggling to read. She didn't want to face humiliation yet again for her academic troubles.

After high school, Corcoran earned her teaching degree, but after one year, she found herself bouncing from job to job. By the time she was waitressing at a diner, she was on her 20th job at just 23 years old.

Waitressing energized Corcoran, who is a people person, but in a job that's all about getting tips, she was losing. Her competition was the Dolly Parton-type, whose large breasts attracted men and increased tips. Feeling defeated, Corcoran thought her self-described "plain" look could never compete. Then, her mom gave Corcoran her first lesson in marketing.

Says Corcoran: "My mom said, 'Why don't you braid your hair and put red bows in to match your uniform.' And I did, and son of a gun, that was exactly the night that Ramone Simone walked in and offered me a ride home."

Simone and Corcoran immediately hit it off, and for the next seven years, the duo dipped into the New York City real estate market and became romantically involved. Simone was the first one to suggest that Corcoran try real estate, noting her uncanny ability to relate to nearly everyone she met. Simone urged Corcoran further, even going so far as to give her the \$1,000 she needed to start her own agency.

As a girl from New Jersey suddenly competing in one of the world's most famous cities, Corcoran was in a league she had never experienced before.

Says Corcoran: "I got set free outside the diner, and I schmoozed people all day. I really enjoyed people ... I was just very energetic, showed them a lot, and talked all the time. I did very well in sales."

But her fatal flaw, Corcoran now admits, was crediting Simone with the success she was building. In her mind, Simone had rescued her from her blue-collar life and ushered her into the glitzy world of New York City. He had even given her \$100 to spend on a "real New York outfit." She had never had new clothes in her life and readily ate up the chance.

THEN, IT ALL CAME CRASHING DOWN

One night, Simone approached Corcoran as she was making pasta for his children and explained that he was going to marry her secretary. Just as quickly as she had been noticed by Simone in the diner, she was dropped. This time, Simone had no idea what kind of firestorm he was creating.



When Corcoran demanded Simone fire the secretary, he reminded her that he owned 51% of the company and wouldn't do that. One year later, Corcoran marched into Simone's office and announced that their partnership was over. She demanded they split the company in half because she was starting her own firm. Corcoran had no idea where she was going to go. She had no office, no tools and no leads. She just knew she was done at Corcoran-Simone.

Corcoran called the landlord leasing their current building and asked if he had any available spaces for a new office and crew. He did — three floors above Corcoran-Simone. She leaped at the chance, satisfied to know that she could be just floors above the man who had sparked her determination.

As Corcoran left the office, Simone stopped her.

"[He] was rightfully very surprised I had ended a business [relationship] with no notice," Corcoran recalled. "And he said, 'You know, Barbara, you'll never succeed without me.'"

Corcoran merely smiled. She would be damned if that was going to be true, and unbeknownst to him, Simone only pushed her to do more. She was going to succeed, and when recessions hit, Simone's words rang in her head, giving her strength.

She was determined to succeed because he had labeled her a failure. The nuns at her school had labeled her a failure too. Later, the real estate boys' club in New York would label her a failure.

Yet, Corcoran rose to success. It all started with marketing advice from her mom, an insult from the man who pulled her from the diner and the persistence inside of her that would not let her quit.

"INSULT THEM ... THEN SHUT YOUR MOUTH"

Finding the right salespeople has been at the forefront of Corcoran's success, and she's become a magnet for the best. However, she didn't build a \$66-million company by only recruiting from top business schools or other firms. She considered everyone for her firm. Coffee shops, social gatherings and shopping visits became job interviews for Corcoran.

The best salesperson Corcoran ever had was plucked from her job as an airline attendant at American Airlines. Corcoran's business partner, Esther Kaplan, was never meant for sales, yet she ensured that Corcoran's spending habits and ability to "throw anything" she could at the wall didn't sink the company.

It wasn't always this easy. Corcoran's rise took time, mistakes and some wrong hires on the path to finding the right formula. Corcoran soon learned that the people

with all the right credentials weren't always the ones propelling sales forward and becoming top agents. Instead, it was those who could sell themselves straight to Corcoran, even as she was flinging insults their way.

"I studied my salespeople my whole life," Corcoran said. "I discovered a method. It's called 'insult them.' Tell them that you don't think they have what it takes and here's why, and then shut your mouth up and see what they do with that."

What the candidate would say next became very important to Corcoran, and she listened with her gut. Some would come out of the gate, claiming to have grit and a belief in themselves that they could sell. But it never meshed, Corcoran explained. Others took the insult personally and twisted it back around onto Corcoran. They proved to her that they not only had the determination she was looking for but that they also couldn't believe what she was saying. Those were the salespeople she hired and the superstars who pushed Corcoran Group to its success. In them, Corcoran could see someone who wouldn't quit, even when they were knocked down.

Says Corcoran: "I found when they take a hit—sales is a lot about taking a hit—they simply felt sorry for themselves, but they took less time to feel sorry for themselves. It's almost as if their IQ was low enough where they got back up. Intelligence would say lay low and lick your wounds."

For Corcoran, a great sales force is told through numbers, but the qualities that make up that force can be found in the failures. Much like the insult hurled at her decades ago, Corcoran believes that times of adversity are when salespeople should show up the most, and finding the right people for that job goes beyond schooling and experience. It's a feeling found deep in the moment of crisis.

Today, Corcoran uses that same philosophy with the entrepreneurs she supports and funds through "Shark Tank."

Says Corcoran: "I wait until they get their first bad hit, and I want to be on the line to hear what they do. The minute I hear, 'It wasn't my fault. That guy promised me ...' Anything that smells like that—I have all my entrepreneurs hanging on a matted frame on my wall—and I walk over and turn them upside down. I remind myself to never spend any more time with them. They're not going to make it."

Building a successful business—one that can withstand mergers, acquisitions, recessions and even insults — doesn't require employees who are prestigiously educated or have worked as salespeople their entire lives. Businesses require much more fundamental support through employees that can think with their gut, move on quickly and build strong foundations.

THE INNOVATION THAT MOVED HER FORWARD

After years of following this sales model, Corcoran sold Corcoran Group for \$66 million. At certain points, there were offers hitting well below that. These moments were often when there appeared to be no other way out of the chokehold than to sell.

That's when Corcoran listened to her own advice—Simone's insult—and persevered more.

At one point, Corcoran was sitting on a \$300,000 debt to Citibank and a credit line she couldn't pay, contemplating how Corcoran Group was going to climb itself out of the recession it was drowning in. Housing interest rates had climbed to 19 percent, and the market was cold. No one was going to dip their toes in that pool, no matter how good the price appeared.

Then, the walls closed in further. An insurance company called her with 88 apartment units that had been on the market for more than two years, and after numerous brokers, they just needed someone to sell the units. It was another blow to Barbara's dwindling options.

"They were the dogs of the market. No kitchens, no baths," Barbara recalled of the seemingly useless dump that had suddenly landed on her lap. "I said, 'Nobody is going to buy this, I hate to tell you.'"

She knew that they had heard it before, but like Corcoran, the insurance company was desperate to push the units off their books.

That night, Corcoran met with Kaplan. Organized and numbers-focused, Kaplan was the calm in Corcoran's energetic and risky business plan. That night, Kaplan and Corcoran debated closing. The funds they had left were far too small to pay off their debts, but those 88 units kept ringing in Corcoran's head. She had been in a tight spot before. Corcoran's style of spending money once it was in the door sometimes worked and sometimes left her scrambling. She had always found her way out, and now, something about those 88 units was beckoning to her.

Corcoran's mind flashed to a seemingly mundane memory from her childhood. As the second oldest of 10 children in a two-bedroom house in New Jersey, Corcoran didn't grow up in luxury. Her father was fired nearly every year for insubordination, while her mother was a meticulous planner with a gift for bringing out the best in each of her children. That memory landed Barbara on her grandfather's farm, where, just across the street, a neighbor was selling Jack Russell terrier puppies.



CORCORAN BELIEVES THAT TIMES OF ADVERSITY ARE WHEN SALESPEOPLE SHOULD SHOW UP THE MOST...

Sleek new vehicles pulled up on the remote road one by one as women in furs and dripping in money stepped out. Corcoran watched with fascination. She had never seen such riches in her neighborhood. Hand-me-downs comprised her wardrobe, and the only vacation the family took was to Atlantic City after her father had received \$1,000 from a three-month business venture.

"When he got his \$1,000 check, I remember the excitement of my father being in business for himself. Like John Wayne himself, he'd pass that \$1,000 check around the table at dinner," Corcoran recalled. "Spending that money in that whole week ... It was like the best memory in our whole life."

Back on the farm, while she and her siblings were watching the lives of the rich and famous on parade, Corcoran overheard her mother compliment their neighbor, Louise, on her ingenuity. Louise knew she only had so many puppies, but she also knew the value of her puppies. If she invited more rich families than she had puppies for to her farm, she would find homes for the little pups in just one day. For the rich families, the mass attraction and desire to be one of the families who purchased the puppies was far greater than ensuring they got a good deal.

Back in her office in New York City, while contemplating shutting her doors for good, Corcoran's last-minute play came to her head. The 88 apartment units were her puppies. She just needed to find her clientele.

Corcoran hosted a "secret sale" of the units, where 200-300 people showed up to look at and possibly purchase the 88 units. Even with housing interest rates at 19 percent and battered apartment units on the market, Corcoran Group sold every single unit and raked in \$1.3 million in commission. Corcoran paid off Citibank, paid her outstanding debts and used the remaining \$600,000 to open a new office.

The queen was back.

"I have found that is my gift every time," Corcoran said. "I see some advantages that I could run right up the damn flagpole." ■



Company Name:
Community Assistance Center

Name & Title:
Jennifer Huffine, President & CEO

Location:
Conroe, TX (HQ) (but serving Montgomery County)

Website:
cac-mctx.org

Industry:
Community Assistance (nonprofit)

CULTIVATING A COMMUNITY OF CARE:

How Greg Brainerd's Team At Braintek Has Helped Jennifer Huffine Of The Community Assistance Center Better Serve The Needs Of Montgomery County

When you're in the business of providing resources for families facing financial hardships, you need robust technology solutions executed by a team of knowledgeable and professional technicians. But you don't just require the implementation. You need an IT firm that is as dedicated to the ongoing success of your business as you are—which is precisely what Jennifer Huffine of the Community Assistance Center has found with Greg Brainerd and his team at Braintek.

BEFORE BRAINTEK

Founded in 1981, the Community Assistance Center has a long history of helping folks throughout Montgomery County who need it most. Take the current President and CEO, for example. Jennifer Huffine never saw herself running a nonprofit organization, yet her journey led her to the Community Assistance Center all the same. “I had a corporate job for many years until I took a position at United Way. While working there, we often referred people to the Community Assistance Center, so that’s how I first learned about it. Eventually, I was offered a job there, and when I called my mom to tell her about the opportunity, I found out that they had actually helped our family when we had fallen on hard times when I was just a little girl. This full-circle moment really solidified that this was the right move for me, and I’ve been working for the company in various capacities for the last six-and-a-half years,” explains Jennifer.

When Jennifer joined the Community Assistance Center, Braintek was already a pivotal facet of their business. “Before Braintek, the [Center] was struggling with improving its efficiencies, managing sensitive client data, implementing cybersecurity protocols, and then, of course, the usual break-fix needs an organization like this is going to have,” says Jennifer. “We’ve relied heavily on volunteers with specialized knowledge. For example, our HR person is a volunteer on the board who specializes in HR. But as our technology needs continued to grow, we knew we needed a dedicated team.” So, how did Community Assistance Center find Greg and his team at Braintek? Well, since the Center is inherently community-minded, they were determined to find not only a local company but one that shared these same values of constantly working to improve the community. This is how they initially found Braintek and have now been building a robust partnership for the past 10+ years.

TAKING OVER THE TECH

As the digital landscape continues to evolve, so does the technology needs of a nonprofit organization such as the Community Assistance Center. “Braintek helps us with so many aspects of our technology strategy, I don’t even know where to begin,” jokes Jennifer. “They’ve helped us implement and manage the health of our servers, they’ve streamlined our employee onboarding process, and [they] are always reviewing our hardware to ensure our computer and other equipment is compatible and up to date.” She adds, “Another big thing they’ve worked with us on is cybersecurity. So, this involves having the proper virus protection on our computers, incorporating multi-factor authentication, and safeguarding our sensitive client data.” And it doesn’t stop there. Braintek helps make sure that the Community Assistance Center meets its relevant compliance requirements, and they’re

even in the process of digitizing 16,000+ client records and organizing them into the cloud for the company as well.

“One thing I wanted to highlight about working with Braintek is how mindful they are of how our company operates. They’ve really taken the time to get to know our business and our team, so they understand exactly what we need in order to best serve our community,” notes Jennifer. And this can be seen not only in every interaction they have but even down to the quarterly audit reports they generate for the Community Assistance Center. “Every quarter, we have an in-person review meeting where we go over how things have been running and identify any areas of vulnerability or concern. Thankfully, they don’t just slap down the 8-page audit on my desk; rather, they take the time to walk me through it and ensure that I fully understand everything so I can make the best-informed decisions for the organization,” says Jennifer. She continues, “Sometimes, if we’re talking about a high-level solution, I’ll get this ‘deer in the headlights’ look, and their team always recognizes this and re-explains the concept in layman’s terms, which I really appreciate.”

FINDING STRENGTH IN COMMUNITY

Since working with Braintek, Jennifer is the first to admit that she doesn’t even worry about the IT side of things anymore. “If I’m being honest, I’ve gotten used to coming into the office and just having things work. With this IT piece off my plate, we’re able to solely focus on improving the lives of our community members, which is truly priceless.” The peace of mind that Braintek provides the Community Assistance Center—and more specifically, its CEO, Jennifer—has allowed for even more opportunities for community engagement. For example, when not dedicating her efforts to CAC, Jennifer, her husband, Michael, and their children are often able to dedicate some of their time to volunteering for other local nonprofits. “Knowing that the Community Assistance Center helped my family all those years ago just pushes me even more to instill these community values within my own family.”

Due to this decade-long partnership, Jennifer is able to sleep soundly at night, knowing CAC is protected by one of the best IT firms in the business. “If you are searching for an IT company that genuinely has your best interest in mind, and not to mention ridiculously knowledgeable and talented technicians, Braintek needs to be on your list of providers to speak with,” states Jennifer. And thanks to Braintek’s dedication, attention to detail, and pursuit of excellence, the team at the Community Assistance Center has been able to get back to focusing on what they do best—serving the Montgomery County by providing basic resources, improving the quality of life for their neighbors, and ultimately, cultivating a community of care. ■

Rockefeller Habits Checklist: Is Your Business On The Path To Sustainable Growth?



BY VERNE HARNISH

Managers who have completed the Rockefeller Habits Checklist (which can be downloaded at ScalingUp.com) often ask us two questions:

1. How did we survive/thrive for all these years yet have nothing checked off on the list?
2. Are the habits in any kind of order?

Responding to the first question, we remind executive teams that this is an execution checklist. It's not necessary to implement any of these habits to build a long-lasting organization. It just means you've been leaving massive amounts of money and time on the table. And if you have a killer strategy and/or heroic people willing to work 18-hour days, eight days a week, these habits will make up for the messes created by sloppy execution and lack of discipline.

To answer the second question, you can't implement any of what I've taught unless Rockefeller Habit No. 1 — "The executive team is healthy and aligned" — exists. The order in which you implement the other habits doesn't matter. Choose just one or two each quarter, based on what will give you the most immediate benefit as you would with the rest of our crossword puzzle-like tools. Over 24-36 months, you'll have moved through all 10 habits.

ROCKEFELLER HABIT NO. 1 The Executive Team Is Healthy And Aligned

Patrick Lencioni's bestselling book "The Five Dysfunctions of a Team: A Leadership Fable" defines the unhealthy situations that can derail your leadership team: an absence of trust, fear of conflict, lack of commitment, avoidance of accountability and inattention to results. If one or more of these afflictions exist, then address it before you tackle any other aspect of execution.

We strongly suggest purchasing Lencioni's affordable "Team Kit." Take your leadership team through his assessment and training process to strengthen the levels of trust, healthy debate, commitment, accountability and results. It's a great tune-up for even healthy teams. At a minimum, require all leaders and managers to read his book once a year. It's a quick read, and a refresher can prevent new problems from arising within the team as you scale up.

Many of the Rockefeller Habits reinforce routines that keep the team healthy, like taking a few minutes to share personal and professional good news at the start of a weekly or monthly meeting. Other ways to help the team build trust include the following:

- Personality and leadership style assessments, which help team members appreciate each other's differences.
- Meal and social time during off-site planning sessions and monthly management meetings.
- Shared learning experiences.

Once the team is healthy, then it is ready to tackle the tough work of setting priorities successfully.

ROCKEFELLER HABIT NO. 2 **Everyone Is Aligned With The No. 1 Thing That Needs To Be Accomplished This Quarter To Move The Company Forward**

Rockefeller Habit No. 2 starts with identifying your Critical Number, introduced and popularized through Jack Stack's classic book, "The Great Game of Business: The Only Sensible Way to Run a Company." Though all your metrics are critical, reserve the term Critical Number for your measurable No. 1 priority, even when other metrics are nearly as important.

To derive the one Critical Number, imagine the hundreds of important things you need to accomplish lined up like dominoes. Find the lead domino: the one initiative that, when pursued, makes it easier to accomplish everything else. Or identify the constraint — the choke point or bottleneck — and address it first. For more on how to choose this "critical" constraint, read my favorite business book of all time, "The Goal" by the late Eliyahu Goldratt. Scaling up is all about eliminating constraints — in the business and for customers.

It's tempting to have a few "main" priorities, but that just means your focus will be pulled in different directions, thus not really achieving anything of significance. For true scalability to occur, I urge you to prioritize one goal and make sure everyone is on board with achieving it.

Scaling a company takes time — it's all about taking a step forward, checking in and adjusting accordingly. This can only happen if there are regular check-ins and goals. One such goal is the quarterly goal that allows for small wins, which leads to your company's focus on its No. 1 priority.

ROCKEFELLER HABIT NO. 3 **Communication Rhythm Is Established And Information Moves Through The Organization Accurately And Quickly**

Meetings have gotten a bad rap, with some corners eschewing the benefits of meetings. However, I believe daily, weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual Meeting Rhythms help to address the No. 1 challenge people face when working together: communication.

It might sound counterintuitive to have this many meetings, but when executed properly, they actually save everyone a lot of time in the long run. Communication will become much more open and smoother, and your team will have the clarity and feedback it needs to focus on the company's No. 1 priority.

ROCKEFELLER HABIT NO. 4 **Every Facet Of The Organization Has A Person Assigned With Accountability For Ensuring Goals Are Met**

Getting accountabilities clear throughout the organization is crucial. There should be one accountable person assigned to each cell within the organization, and this needs to be clear throughout the organization. Of course, this doesn't mean this person is the boss or gets to make all the decisions.

ROCKEFELLER HABIT NO. 5 **Ongoing Employee Input Is Collected To Identify Obstacles And Opportunities**

Ah yes, data — both measurable and immeasurable — will fuel clear decision making. This is the first key component for qualitative data you'll need to guide the business. It is critical for senior leadership and middle managers to engage their employees in data collection from within the company. In other words, roll up your sleeves and prepare to take notes.

Here are some guidelines we recommend:

- Collect data from your employees, especially your sales channels and those on the front line as they are closest to the action.
- Talk to one employee a week. Here is the question senior leaders should ask: "What should the company start/stop/keep doing?"
- Pay attention to the "stops" as this will give you an idea of the roadblocks your people face and what to eliminate.

To download your copy of the Rockefeller Habits Checklist, visit ScalingUp.com today. ■

Verne Harnish is founder of the world-renowned Entrepreneurs' Organization (EO), with over 13,000 members worldwide, and chaired for 15 years EO's premiere CEO program, the "Birthing of Giants" held at MIT, a program in which he still teaches today.

Founder and CEO of Scaling Up, a global executive education and coaching company with over 200 partners on six continents, Verne has spent the past three decades helping companies scaleup.



6 IRREFUTABLE WAYS TO BE A MORE EFFECTIVE, INFLUENTIAL AND SUCCESSFUL LEADER

ACCORDING TO AMERICA'S NO. 1 LEADERSHIP AUTHORITY, JOHN C. MAXWELL

“How you lead determines how well you succeed.” — John Maxwell

If you're like much of the population, at some point in your life, you've experienced poor leadership. Either you've had a boss that made you dread coming to work, or you have been part of an organization where the leader was difficult and focused on your shortcomings. If you're fortunate, you've also experienced working with a great leader. One who valued you, listened to you, motivated and inspired you.

The former leader leads to low morale, high turnover and a below-average company while the latter leader leads to a team of highly motivated and talented employees, company growth and an organization that is continually achieving new levels of success.

So, what makes one person a great leader and another a poor one? During a private, closed-door training, John Maxwell answered that question. He discussed the laws of leadership that make a great leader. He also revealed the good news that, even if you are a poor leader today, you can develop your leadership skills to become a great leader.

Maxwell, who has been studying, speaking, teaching, training and writing about leadership for more than five decades, is the founder of the largest leadership training organization in the world. He has trained six million leaders — in every country in the world. He wrote the first book ever written on leadership that said you can develop yourself as a leader. The book, “The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership,” immediately became a bestseller and is the all-time bestselling leadership book ever written. It's been printed in 56 different languages and sold millions of copies. In China alone, it's sold over 10 million copies.

The reason Maxwell's laws of leadership are so popular is because they work. And the reason they work is because they are foundational laws. For a law of leadership to be included in the book, it had to meet specific criteria: It had to work in any culture, anywhere in the world. And it had to

work regardless of time. In other words, it worked 100 years ago, it works today and it will work 100 years from now.

Here are key takeaways from John Maxwell's presentation that will help you lead your company better so that your business can reach its full potential:

The law of the lid. Maxwell defines this law by saying, “Leadership ability is the lid that determines a person's level of effectiveness. The lower an individual's ability to lead, the lower the lid on his potential.” In other words, “How you lead determines how well you succeed.” On a scale of one to 10, if your leadership skills are at a level five, your company will never rise above that. At most, Maxwell says, your company will be at a level four. In other words, if you are an average leader, you'll have a slightly below average organization. Your company can never rise above your level of leadership.

Says Maxwell: “Everything rises and falls on leadership. It works in the business world. It works in government. It works in education. It works in religion. How well you lead is going to determine how well you succeed. Your leadership is your lid. The great news is, you can learn to lead, and not only can you learn to lead, your people can learn to lead.”

YOUR LEADERSHIP LID IS YOUR LID.

If you want to grow your company, you must do two things. You must develop yourself and you must develop others to grow them into leaders. When you develop yourself, you begin to add to your life. When you develop others, you begin to multiply the value you add to others. Once you add value to a leader, that leader turns around and influences a lot of people.

“This law is the most important law,” Maxwell said. “Not because it's more important than the others, but if you understand this law, you will begin to spend the rest of your life with a passion to learn how to lead better than you do now.”

THERE ARE ONLY TWO THINGS THAT MAKE YOUR LEADERSHIP SUCCEED.

“If you really want it to rise, you have to have good leadership skills, and you have to have good values,” Maxwell said. “One won’t substitute for the other.” Good leadership coupled with bad values creates large turnover in organizations because people don’t want to stay with you. “If you have great leadership skills, but you have bad values, you will know how to lead people, but because your values aren’t right, you’ll manipulate them and you’ll begin to take advantage of them,” he said. “You’ll begin to have people adding value to you instead of you adding value to them.”

Great values coupled with poor leadership skills won’t grow your company. Maxwell explains: “If you have great values, but you don’t have leadership skills, then the good news is you’re going to be a wonderful person. I tell people if you know somebody that has good values, but they don’t have leadership skills, make them your friend, not your leader. But when both leadership skills and good values come into play, that’s when everything really begins to rise. When you grow yourself as a leader, you grow your organization. And when you grow the people on your team and your organization’s leaders, everything follows.”

The law of magnetism. Like attracts like. You can’t expect to attract highly talented, quality people to your organization if you don’t possess those types of qualities yourself. To attract better people, you’ve got to become the kind of person you want to attract. “We don’t attract who we want, we attract who we are,” Maxwell said. “This is the law of magnetism.” If you are a leader who is a level five, you are not going to attract a level eight leader. “When you raise your lid, you not only build your organization, you attract higher level people,” he said.

The law of process. With this law, Maxwell emphasizes the importance of watching your daily habits and priorities. People have the tendency to underestimate the process of developing leaders. You don’t develop a leader in a four-week crash course. There is a process that you must value and commit to.

Says Maxwell: “Leaders develop daily, not in a day. I can tell you we need to not microwave leaders; we need to crockpot leaders. You don’t need a leadership course. You need a leadership culture. There’s a world of difference between those two. But the moment that you develop a leadership culture where consistently leadership is taught, and leadership is lived, and leadership is shared, and leadership is valued, the moment that you begin to develop a leadership culture, then things really begin to change incredibly for your organization.”

BECOMING A GREAT LEADER IS A LIFELONG JOURNEY.

After hearing Earl Nightingale say that if you spend one hour a day every day on the same subject for five years, you could become an expert on the subject, Maxwell started spending at least one hour every day on learning about leadership. He read books about leadership, talked to leaders and asked them questions about leadership. He did leadership exercises. As he practiced leadership,

he began to get better. People started following him more and his influence began to expand. He could tell he was really learning how to lead, and that he was getting better. But he cautions that you don’t ever want to make the mistake of thinking you’ve arrived or that you’ve become an expert at leadership. Instead, it’s about continual growth and development within your lifetime.

Says Maxwell: “I was growing as a leader, and all of a sudden, the law of process began to take place in my life. It doesn’t take place in one day, and you don’t want to stop and say, ‘I just got good.’ Once you get into the process, you develop your leadership, and as you grow, you realize yesterday doesn’t look as great. Most people miss this. When you’re growing in the process, your success is being stored before it shows up. You’ve been a success the whole time, it’s just today that it shows up. See, the law of process says it’s got to be stored before it shows up. I stopped asking ‘*How long will it take?*’ and I started asking ‘*How far can I go?*’ At the end of five years, I wasn’t an expert. I’m not an expert now, and I’ve been doing it for 50 years. Because the more you know, the more you know you don’t know. And the more you know you don’t know, the more you know you need to know more. So, if you need to know more, and you know you don’t know enough, you’re not an expert. The only experts I know are people that don’t know much but have a title.”

The law of addition. Maxwell defines this law by saying, “Leaders add value by serving others.” He says that you add value to others when you truly value them and when you intentionally do everything you can to make yourself valuable to them. Maxwell continues: “In relationships, you’re either a plus or a minus in life. It’s not that complicated. This whole area of valuing people and adding value to people. What it does is it allows you to be a plus in their life. When you’re a plus in person’s life, when they see you walk into the room, they say, ‘Oh my gosh, I’m so glad to see you.’”

As leaders, we add value to people. Maxwell’s coaching company has 50,000 coaches in 172 countries around the world. He takes his coaches through the qualities he believes are extremely important to be a successful organization. “Our opening line is this: We are people of value, who value people and add value to them,” Maxwell said.

If you want to become a leader, Maxwell suggests you start by intentionally adding value to people every day. “All kinds of people have leadership titles and positions,” Maxwell said. “They’re just taking walks. But how you gain influence is by adding value to people.”

PRACTICAL WAYS MAXWELL ADDS VALUE TO PEOPLE EVERY DAY.

First and foremost, Maxwell truly values people. Every day he thinks of ways to add value to people. Maxwell explains: “Every day I look at my schedule and where I am going to go. Who am I going to talk to? What am I going to say? If you look for ways to add value to people, you’ll find ways to add value. But if you don’t look for ways to add value to people, you won’t add value to them because you’ll never find a way. How we view things is how we do things.”



He also does things to add value to people. Ask yourself who you are going to add value to today and at the end of the day, review whom you added value to and how you added value to them. Says Maxwell: “I’m very intentional because I understand that when you begin to add value to people, you begin to increase your influence with people. Think of anybody that adds value to you in your own life on your team or whatever. They have a major influence with you. Why? Because they are constantly adding value to you every day.”

Another way he adds value is by encouraging others to add value to people. “If you and the people in your organization are very intentional in adding value to people, it’s a game changer,” he said.

The law of solid ground. Maxwell defines this law by saying, “Trust is the foundation of leadership.” He discovered this law as he was teaching leadership skills around the world. He began teaching the golden rule: Treat others as you would like to be treated yourself. “That value is taught in every religion and in every culture in the world,” Maxwell said. “It’s a wonderful value, and I began to understand right then how important trust was. Trust is the foundation of leadership. It always has been and it always will be.”

When Maxwell was asked to speak at the United Nations, he taught a lesson called “Three Questions Every Follower Asks of Their Leader.” He chose this subject because he wanted something that would work universally. “These work in any country, any culture and it works in your company,” Maxwell said.

THREE QUESTIONS PEOPLE ASK AS THEY LOOK AT YOU AS A LEADER.

The first question people ask when they realize you are their leader is “Do you like me?” “It’s nice to have a leader that likes you,” Maxwell said. “It makes it easier.” He adds that if you don’t like the people you lead, you should “go home and stay home.” “If you don’t like the people you lead, it’s only a matter of time before you manipulate them,” Maxwell said. “And manipulation is always wrong.” When you manipulate people, you move people for your own personal advantage, and that’s always wrong. Leaders move people, and there is nothing wrong with that as long as it’s for mutual advantage, but you should not move people for your personal advantage.

The second question people ask is “Can you help me?” That’s what makes you a leader. If you can’t help people and make things better in your company because you are leading it, then you aren’t fulfilling your leadership role. “If I follow you and you’re going to lead me, are you going to make things better for me?” Maxwell said. “Because when you think about it, leaders make things better. In fact, our company slogan is, Everyone deserves to be led well.”

The third question is “Can I trust you?” This is where you begin to understand the value of good values. Maxwell teaches values around the world. “We’re asked by the president of the country to come in and teach values to small groups,” Maxwell said. “What

we’ve found is when people learn good values, they live those good values and become more valuable. When kids have good values inside, they need less validation on the outside. But when they lack good values on the inside, they need more validation.”

In the law of solid ground, trust is the foundation in relationships, and it’s an important, life-changing law. “Go inside yourself for a moment as a leader and think of the people on your team,” Maxwell said. “Ask yourself these simple questions, ‘Do I like them? Do I make life better for everybody? Can people trust me?’”

The law of priorities. Maxwell defines this law as follows: “Leaders understand that activity is not necessarily accomplishment.” The Pareto principle, named after the Italian economist Vilfredo Pareto who wrote about the 80/20 connection, states that for many outcomes, roughly 80 percent of consequences come from 20 percent of causes. You may have also heard this called the 80/20 rule. Maxwell explains: “It’s all about priorities. The Pareto principle basically says, if you have 10 things to do, if you’ll list them in order of importance, where number one is truly number one, if you’ll just do the top two out of the 10, you’ll get an 80 percent return on everything you want in your life. The 80/20 principle is powerful. Forget priorities for a moment. The top 20 percent of the people in your organization give you 80 percent of the return. We tend to spend 80 percent of our time with the bottom 20 percent and we get very little return. Instead, we need to spend 80 percent of the time with the top 20 percent of the people.”

THE THREE Rs.

Maxwell teaches what he calls “the three Rs”. The three Rs are what’s required of you, what gives you your greatest return and what gives you your greatest reward. “Your goal is to do the things that are required of you, the things that give you the greatest return, and the things that give you the most important reward,” he said. “When those are all the same things, you are in your sweet spot.”

While it’s important to learn and understand all the laws of leadership, Maxwell points out that no one practices all the laws. Read *The 21 Irrefutable Laws of Leadership*. Start learning and practicing leadership. When you do that, and develop a passion to learn how to lead, you’ll spend the rest of your life becoming a better leader than you are now. “Every leader can grow,” Maxwell said. “But it takes dedication to do so and a willingness to work for it.” If you take the time to learn the laws of leadership, you’ll get better at leadership. And when you get better at leadership, you’ll raise the level of your company. ■

John C. Maxwell has spent the last 40 years inspiring and challenging people from numerous Fortune 500 companies, national trade associations, nonprofits and educational institutions to grow, change, and find their passion.



5 Essential Tech Tools To Grow Your Business And Two You Should Not Waste Your Money On

BY GREG BRAINERD

Growing your business involves learning how to make money and hang on to it responsibly. When you're in the weeds, it's easy to think that a fancy piece of well-marketed software could help you dig your way out. That's usually not the case, and you'll likely end up paying for software that you don't need and barely use, and that burns through your bank account.

On the other hand, there is some technology that most growing organizations benefit from. When set up and implemented correctly, these softwares can improve operations, increase efficiency and lend a hand to revenue-generating efforts. Investing in the right technology is not a wasted expense. However, with so many options, especially with the new wave of AI-powered digital tools, it can be challenging to decide which ones you need and which ones are distractions.

Let's review all of these software options, starting with the five tech tools you should use to grow your business:

1. Direct Messaging Platforms – Whether everyone is in-office, remote, or hybrid, a communication tool is a must. These tools allow for targeted communication that can be one-on-one, small, select groups, entire departments, channels within the organization, or the entire organization. This feature helps to keep messages relevant instead of consuming everyone's time. Tools like Microsoft Teams or Slack are popular options that offer video call capabilities, integrate with other tech tools, can leverage AI, and more. Other critical factors to consider when choosing which software you'll use are whether it's high-speed, easy to use, scalable, and whether the software company provides great support.

2. Project Management Software – This is essential for internal and external projects to keep you on track, on budget and organized. Using this tool, you can work with others on your team to set deadlines, assign tasks, monitor deliverables, track issues, connect with clients for feedback or approval and more. However, there are many options available that have more features than you need. When choosing project management software, first see if there are any industry favorites. For example, JobNimbus is specialized software for roofers in the contracting industry. Others exist specifically for health care. Finding these unique options can help you get the project solutions you need. If you're looking for a general tool, software like Monday, Asana and ClickUp all continue to top the popularity chart.

3. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Software – If you've been tracking leads and customers via pencil and paper or with a simple spreadsheet, this tool will change the game for you. CRMs allow you to store your customer information in one place, which can help streamline your sales process, strengthen customer relationships, increase sales and help you run a smoother operation. Again, look for industry-specific options first. After that, tools like Keap or Salesforce come highly recommended.

4. Cloud Computing Solutions – These are vital for all organizations that share data or collaborate on projects. The cloud is a web-based hub that holds all your data virtually and can be manipulated by anyone with access at any time, even at

the same time. It syncs to all connected devices to share changes in real time, allowing for better collaboration and scale-up as your company grows. Cloud platforms to consider are Microsoft Azure, Google Drive, Amazon Web Services (AWS) or Dropbox.

5. Cybersecurity Solutions – Digital tools make running your company easier, but they invite new threats into your business. Cybersecurity is a serious issue for business owners. You handle sensitive data, financial information and more for you and your clients, so safeguarding it against cybercriminals is necessary. Computers, USBs, mobile devices, servers and networks must all be secured. While there are antivirus and firewall solutions available for you to set up on your own, having an IT company with a cybersecurity expert on the team monitoring your network is recommended. Hackers break through the standard firewalls regularly, which leaves people who think they are protected unknowingly exposed. With 24/7 monitoring, an IT team can patch those holes before cybercriminals can find them.

Those are five tools all business owners would benefit from. But what about items you don't need? Here are two you can avoid wasting money on:

1. Ineffective AI Tools – With the launch of ChatGPT, a wave of new AI-powered programs has popped up. It seems like there is an AI tool for everything. The problem is, can these tools be used effectively? Many programs were rushed to market and are still in the early stages of development. They have frustrating bugs and limitations and don't produce quality results. Be selective about which AI tools you use. Do you need it? Does it work? Remember, whenever you sign up for another free trial or create an account, you're giving your private information to a company that could experience a data breach. Choose carefully!

2. Duplicates – Are you paying twice for the same tool? As software companies merge and develop new features, you might find that you can consolidate your tools in one place. For example, if you're using Canva to design images for social media and something else like Hootsuite to schedule them, you could reduce the number of tools you use from two to one because Canva can schedule the posts for you! There are likely other areas in your business where this can happen. Spend some time evaluating what you invest in to see if you can eliminate anything.

When it comes to running an efficient business, choosing the right tech tools is critical to your success. Instead of spending your valuable time researching the best options, let our tech experts help. Using our *free* Network Assessment, we can help you identify bottlenecks and areas of opportunity in your business to help you save money, improve productivity and grow. Book your free assessment with us now or call our team to get started. ■



Greg Brainerd is Founder & CEO of Braintek IT Services. They are based in Houston and to find out more about what they do and how they could help you, please visit [Braintek.com](https://www.braintek.com).

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Who Are We?

Founded in 2003 in Houston, Texas, Competitive Choice Inc. began as a small business led by President and CEO Aundrea Young. Competitive Choice is a privately held, woman-owned firm servicing Construction, MEP Contractors, Military Logistics, Government and Military, Education, Healthcare, Hospitality, Fleet Maintenance, Prisons & Municipalities, Energy, Oil, and Gas industries.



20 Years
In Business!

