

Ten!

If someone had told us that going into business for ourselves would entail incessant apprehension and uncertainty, we might have hesitated in our headlong plunge to present ourselves to the business world as the next best thing in consulting and project management. But we were already adept at those anxieties and were gripped by the allure of autonomy and variety. It has not been a mistake for us to pursue our dreams of professional independence. It has not been easy, but there is a magnificent joy in the simple statement "We are self-employed."

We have relished the privilege of rubbing elbows with ordinary people who are extraordinary in their interesting ideals, beliefs, quirks and experiences. They are troves of invaluable teachings. A few have become cherished friends and many have contributed to our enormous collection of fond and funny memories. Even fewer have become fodder for these newsletters, although we've had to resist the appeal to print many of the things we've seen since we've not expanded to the extent that we have a legal team on staff.

To quote one of our favorite people, Mike Pazzi, the last ten years has been like Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. The quest for the eternal happy face is the entrepreneur's most daunting challenge. One must be relentlessly canny and cautious. Patience, being a grand virtue, is not always in supply when the demand is high. A client's indecision or ignorance in a time for crucial change can be intensely frustrating. Depending on the culture of the company in which one has been hired, observations and suggestions are not always solicited, encouraged or welcomed.

When we started out, we didn't have a "hook" like so many other firms who can boast about new methods borne of startling discoveries after years of research conducted by learned scholars. We did not have a book that gave us the exalted credibility that comes of being published. Indeed, we were aware but unclear in our "value proposition" other than the fact that we would do our best—always and (mostly) enthusiastically. Not exactly a compelling advertisement.

Our first mistake was to announce ourselves as a training company: we thought we had so much to impart and enjoyed facilitation! Thankfully, we were talked out of our initial idea to name our business "DETAILS", or Delivering Excellence Through Anecdotal and Innovative Learning Sessions. Instead, we settled on Business Solutions by Design, but after a year or so, when receiving an email referring to us as "BS by Design", we changed to Business Insights, Inc. We also knew that we were more than facilitators—we are project

managers. We love the moniker former co-worker and client Dennis Shirley's gave us: *Process Thinkers*.

For those who envy our seeming freedom and ease of life, let us dispel you of some common misconceptions of having one's own company. We do get to work in our PJs, but most of you are sleeping during these times. We have *some* latitude in our hours but know that the client's priorities are more important than our own. Travel to inconvenient places at bad times is part of the deal (we like books on tape). The money is not constant nor exorbitant. Writing proposals is really un-fun. Medical and business insurances are very expensive. Offering services instead of physical products is more difficult to sell and the sales cycle longer. We don't write off lunches and dinners with friends and family: the firm's money is *our* money anyway, and it is dishonest, not to mention illegal. Hardest of all is that it is not as accepted for contractors like us to express human feelings to the same extent as employees.

It behooves would-be entrepreneurs to know that all excuses are stripped away. There is no blaming the company or co-workers for things gone awry. There is no safety in being part of a team that took the direction of the boss and succeeded or failed as a group. Everything you say and do in the presence of a client can be either a plus or minus (sometimes both, depending on the opining party) to your reputation. You are your own cheerleader and critic; you must take a hard look at the benefits you provide to clients and make changes before they are suggested to you or you are rejected for your failure to make them.

All of this is exhilarating to us. We were always ruminators. One of the things we love is the brainstorming we do together to originate something or improve on an idea. We realize our great fortune in having each other as confidants, equals, friends and officers of the most important corporation we will have ever worked for—ours. The opportunities to be creative and thoughtful and to do good work more than compensates for any barriers we encounter.

Much of our esteem comes from the feedback of our clients. In some circumstances, it can be folly to base one's worth on what is received externally. For sure, we don't agree with everyone. But the self-employed cannot build on just the self. It is all about the client. We must choose work that fits our skills, not our wallets.

Rooted in our hearts is the certainty that business is about people. That's why we do what we do with a more personal investment than typical contractors/consultants. The work we do paints the portrait



of our company. When we leave a client, we strive to have left behind a sustaining and positive impression.

Ours is not a perfect 10. We have learned from our foibles and celebrate that they are outnumbered by our triumphs. Just reaching our ten-year anniversary has been a monumental accomplishment for which we are incredibly proud. Character and the integrity thereof are everything for people like us. Staying true to our ethics and sticking to our strengths has resulted in repeat customers.

In a recent radio interview, former football linebacker Bill Romanowski said, "When I was driven by passion, I sacked quarterbacks and made plays. When I was driven by fear...that was when I stepped over the line." We get that.

We sleep soundly at night and laugh often. And we look forward to the next 10 years. Please accept our deepest gratitude for your support, encouragement and feedback.

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Written by Leslie Charlesworth
 Edited by Denise Dollard

Many trees have already been sacrificed on this subject, so we'll keep it brief. One purpose in bringing it up again is to serve as the simple reminder that nobody expects perfection from leaders or managers, but they do expect efforts that show that the well-being of staff is foremost in a superior's thinking. A second, less noble reason is to give something to employees they can anonymously slip into an interoffice envelope or sneak onto a boss's desk as a silent but urgent plea for change.

In short: "A Manager 'does the thing right' and a Leader 'does the right thing.'"

We think that the terms 'Leader' and 'Manager' ought to be awarded as titles, not something that define the job function. We think it is something to be proven and heralded, not assumed with fingers crossed. Truly, there are many people in such positions who neither manage nor lead. Isn't it funny that bad leaders are easier to spot than good ones? Promotions to positions that involve inspiring people to reach higher and do better should be made only when the abilities of that person are evident.

Consider how your own personal opinions, as strong as they might be, can change. We recall many instances in which our position on a controversial matter has been altered when we have received input from a person we respect. The weight of words and actions by those we revere have a far greater impact

than those of any others, regardless of status or title. Can you relate to a song or movie you claimed to dislike but changed your mind after discussing the prowess of the performers with a good friend whose opinions matter to you? Same thing. Leaders stir thinking, influence decisions and energize others.

It has been interesting to us, this recent petition by leaders of the three major automakers, to get government bailout money for their ailing companies. They didn't understand until being publicly humiliated that a turnaround had to begin with them, personally, to convince lawmakers to spend **our** tax money to fix their lack of leadership. (Incidentally, we wonder now how much we really will pay for cars, considering we work hard to make the payments on something we buy or lease that is taxed on our after-tax income, and then a portion of our taxed income gets handed to them as well.)

There is a glut of good information on leaders and managers. And it is necessary to acknowl-

edge there are times when both managers and leaders must cross roles.

Here is an excerpted list of definitions that distinguish the two from Warren Bennis in his book "On Becoming a Leader":

- ♦ The manager focuses on **systems and structure**; the leader focuses on **people**.
- ♦ The manager **accepts** reality; the leader **investigates** it.
- ♦ The manager **maintains**; the leader **develops**.
- ♦ The manager **imitates**; the leader **originates**.
- ♦ The manager is the classic **good soldier**; the leader is his or her **own person**.
- ♦ The manager relies on **control**; the leader inspires **trust**.

UN-BOSSSES: THE TOP TEN CHARACTERISTICS FOR HAPPY SUCCESSFULNESS (AND THE TEN WORST)

We try to make your voices heard, but we also have some advice: you need to act like there is a layoff coming and the targets will be selected based on performance and performance only. In the end, it is in your best interest to become so valuable as to be irreplaceable. In other words, to act more like an entrepreneur than a worker. If you don't really care about the consequences of being satisfactory instead of extraordinary, that is your choice, and possibly your peril.

Here's two checklists to think about. The order varies across industries or job functions, but these are THE lists compiled from several sources. Job seekers and employees alike should be aware of these and work on any that need

shoring up or shipping out.

THE 10 BEST CHARACTERISTICS OF UN-BOSSSES

1. Communication skills—ability to listen, write and speak effectively. This was the most-cited characteristic in all surveys.
2. Dependability and loyalty—punctuality; speaking positively to others, meeting/ beating deadlines.
3. Initiative—looking around and taking ownership for work that needs to be done instead of waiting for it to be assigned; suggesting new ideas.
4. Attitude—How much do others enjoy working with you? Do you go out of your way to help others? Do your interpersonal skills help get work done or hinder it?
5. Analytical/research skills—Effectiveness of judgement, application of sound logic, identification of key issues or emerging trends.
6. Flexibility and adaptability—willingness to manage multiple tasks, set priorities and adapt to changing conditions.
7. Professionalism—acting responsible and fair is seen as a sign of maturity and self-confidence.
8. Energy/passion—demonstrating enthusiasm in both words and action.



9. Willingness to learn—an openness to changing and evolving processes, technologies and points of view; an interest in continuing education.
10. Bilingual skills—the demand is increasing.

The Top Ten Things That Should Get You Fired:

1. Using drugs or drinking while on the job.
2. Frequently missing work without any plausible explanation and/or being excessively late.
3. Entering false information on records.
4. Inability or unwillingness to grasp and apply training or follow directions (incompetence).
5. Sexual harassment.
6. Blatant rudeness or disrespectful/inappropriate behavior; engaging in verbal abuse or physical aggression towards co-workers, clients, etc.
7. Using the company property for personal business.
8. Disclosing company trade secrets or confidential client information.
9. Engaging in any illegal activity while on the job, including stealing information or property.
10. Being really bad in two or more of the characteristics from the 10 Best list.

If management decided to place the pictures of the employees who personify each of the good and bad characteristics we have listed here, who would be on the Wall of Fame versus the Wall of Shame?

If your colleagues were to perform the same exercise, would the walls look any different in terms of whose mug appeared under which heading? Hmmm.

Light Touches & DARK TIMES

The Top 10 Best and Worst Company Practices

We've drawn from our experiences over the past ten years both as consultants and consumers to compile the following list. Question: Why don't the leaders of companies with bad practices fix them?



DIAMONDS

- Family First:** while engaged at work for Nestle, we were astonished by the many benefits and values established by then-CEO Joe Weller. One was a firm resolve to prohibit any meetings on Fridays. This was fiercely enforced; Fridays were for wrapping up one's week and preparing for time off with the family—not starting something new or adding to an already-prodigious To Do List.
- Helpful Hints:** City National Bank supplies a plethora of how-to's and advice on their internal website/intranet for employees, ranging from Excel tips and tricks, to spotting or avoiding scams targeting seniors.
- Extras:** Sony Pictures Entertainment has an on-site theater featuring Sony movies for employees to enjoy for free. Nestle also sponsors elaborate activities for kids on Take Your Offspring to Work days and offers participation in blind taste tests to employees.
- Demystification:** Biotech company Amgen establishes a hotline for a variety of patient assistance services. It is staffed by real people that guide both doctors and patients through an often complicated and frustrating insurance reimbursement maze. Their SafetyNet® foundation helps uninsured patients get access to Amgen products.
- Internal Insights:** Although long ago, former First Interstate Bank's *Monday Morning* weekly one-page newsletter was an outstanding publication containing timely company and industry information; it featured a regular column entitled "From the President's Desk" in which our then-leader Bill Siart imparted messages that lauded achievements, cemented values and reinforced priorities.
- Up for the Customer:** Trader Joe's markets has thumbed nose at corporate greed in favor of driving sales through client satisfaction. Their products are of comparable quality to upscale stores, but are offered at incomparably lower prices. The employees, called "Crew Members" dress in tropical attire and are consistently happy and helpful. Their Fearless Flyer mailers are more like fun

reading than the bold and cluttered glossies that are favored by the big chains. They even ask where you are parked; then point your cart in the right direction!

- Intelligence:** Amazon.com uses your search and purchase history to promote other potential purchases. It is actually helpful, not pushy. They also do a fine job of keeping buyers apprised of purchase shipping dates, allow pre-sales of yet-unpublished works and were among the first sites to solicit and print client feedback.
- Genuine Joy:** We're glad corporate America lost its obsession for calling us by name and now rewards employees who actually smile, act friendly and seem to enjoy their lots in life. Encountering genuinely nice people drives more business than forcing familiarity.
- Collaboration:** Companies like Genentech and Google, voted as Best Place to Work in 2006 and 2007 respectively, both practice collaboration as a way of life. This entails employee engagement in idea generation for product development and company strategy. It means nurturing open dialogue and equal deference among staff and management.
- Best Practices:** A long-ago custom (again, from First Interstate Bank) was the periodic debrief of recently-hired employees regarding comparative procedures and processes; mining for improvements in products, profit, service, etc. Extremely valuable information can be learned from someone with external experience. This also works with longtime employees who have developed smart shortcuts or workarounds that are not standard procedure.

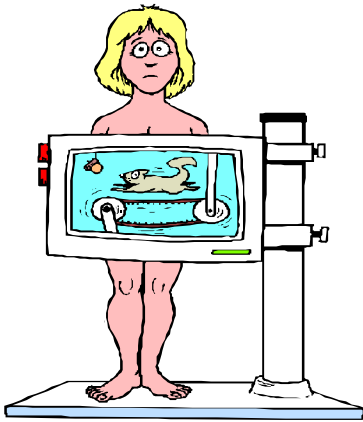


COAL

- Self-Serving Policies:** Conveniences for the company at the expense of the customer like call center employees who leave messages asking clients to call them back but do not provide a direct number (too many companies); Cleaning or stocking shelves during business hours and blocking customer access (Costco, Home Depot).
- Fee Packing:** Cable and telephone companies are notorious for tacking on so-called taxes and surcharges, but banks and credit card companies are also adroitly loading bills with vague or hidden charges.



- Turning Cheeks Versus Booting Butts:** Excusing inexcusable acts by Executives that would result in termination for lower level positions. The list is long, but lying, verbal abuse, sexual harassment and racism are a few we've seen too often.
- Image Ignorance:** Small things, such as forms with inadequate or unclear instructional information or that contain errors and omissions can lead to disaster, like ending up as exhibits in class action suits. Websites that are difficult to navigate are also smears on a company's reputation. So are illogical policies and unprofessional service employees.
- Asking but not Acting:** Employee email surveys touted as confidential (a gripe unto itself) that reveal needs for change that are not acknowledged or pursued. Even worse is when results are not reported back to the survey participants or are spun to impart a higher-than-factual morale level.
- Lateness:** Contractors, doctors, the entire airline industry, service people, co-workers, and so on. It drives us crazy that people show such disrespect. We don't deal with any we don't have to. Let us repeat: our time is not yours to spend (unless you're paying).
- Empty Promises:** Our (now-former) plumber's voicemail greeting says "Please leave a message and I'll return your call immediately. As of this writing, 'immediately' expired 7 hours ago. And don't even get us started on false advertising by big business.
- Unawareness of Client Realities:** Shame on any leader who doesn't know, first hand, how his or her company's service is.
- Quick Reaction/Slow Proaction:** Cultures in which covering one's butt occurs more frequently than sticking one's neck out leads to mediocrity, stagnation and ultimately, failure.
- Flushing Money:** Allowing underperformers to loiter, especially in tough times. It's a waste of precious profit. Now, more than ever, is the time to raise the bar of work ethics, because there are a lot of good people available for work, and it is almost criminal to allow slugs to linger. Get out the salt.



Looking Back & Moving Forward

The Dow closed at 9181 at year-end 1998. Bill Clinton questioned the definition of the word "is" and despite impeachment efforts, achieved his highest-ever approval rating (73). Postage was 32 cents and a gallon of gas averaged \$1.15.

We wondered then what comprised the perfect socio-economic and political factors for independent contractors. Back then, the annual rate of inflation was 1.55%. It was also the first time in 30 years that the US enjoyed a budget surplus. It seemed like a good time to jump off the cliff of seeming job security without a net.

What a change! President George W. Bush, once with a 92 approval rating is now hovering in the 20s and similarly, the DJIA has had more swings than a schizoid off his meds. Through tragedies such as September 11th and Hurricane Katrina, and feats like the uneventful turn of the century or new technology like GPS systems, we've found that the *nature* of the need for good work may change, but there is no change in need.

Insider Insights
Thoughts and Information We Felt Like Sharing

Whether job growth spikes or plummets, there are strong reasons to hire contractors. When employment is high, more proactive programs and initiatives are needed. When layoffs occur, there is still someone required to perform critical work. Always, there is more work than can be accomplished by the people who are working.

The beauty of hiring contractors is multifaceted. Companies do not have to pay benefits to the self-employed. The timeline is set by the hiring firm. There is scant risk of a regretful decision because nobody will recommend a bad contractor, and if they don't fit for some reason, the arrangement is easily severed with little chance of repercussion. Contractors come with client lists and "portfolios" of their work. They have diversity in their experiences across companies (sometimes bigger thinking and deeper quality. Probably most important is that a contractor wants to come back, so will always do his or her absolute best work. There is no complacency.

So there is no bad time to be a contractor. There are bad reasons, but opportunities abound for the conscientious and principled entrepreneur who finds motivation from within.

We credit much of our success to our hard-working parents who taught us about initiative, fostered introspection, urged creativity and relentlessly cautioned us on our manners and respect for others (most of that stuck). We will continue our endeavors to make them proud because it still means so very much to be as good as they might ever have dreamed we could be.



Beacon Bits

Quotations to cast rays of humanity across everyday business life

Shun idleness. It is a rust that attaches itself to the most brilliant metals. - Voltaire

Imagination is more important than knowledge. - Albert Einstein

I have not observed men's honesty to increase with their riches. - Thomas Jefferson

Ignorance is voluntary misfortune. - Nicholas Lang

Be awful nice to 'em goin' up, because you're gonna meet 'em all comin' down. - Jimmy Durante

There will always be another reality to make fiction of the truth we think we've arrived at. - Christopher Fry

**Last Laughs:
Market Savvy**

Redefined terms that more aptly describe these financial times, from friends Marty and Donna Friis.

CEO—Chief Embezzlement Officer.

CFO—Corporate Fraud Officer.

VALUE INVESTING—The art of buying low and selling lower.

BROKER—what your broker has made you.

STANDARD & POOR—Your life, in a nutshell.

FINANCIAL PLANNER—A guy whose phone has been disconnected.

MARKET CORRECTION—The day after you buy stocks.

CASH FLOW—The movement your money makes as it disappears down the toilet.

INSTITUTIONAL INVESTOR—Past year investor now locked up in a nuthouse.

PROFIT—archaic word no longer in use.

And a few *we* created are:

200.5K—new name for devalued 401K plans.

BAILOUT: Name of an upcoming hybrid car from one of the Big Three.

MUTUAL FUND: Pooling your money with that of your friends to buy a keg.

INTEREST INCOME: No longer significant enough to make a difference on your tax return.

CASH: A collectible not available on eBay. Also the last name of a deceased Boy named Sue.

STOCK: Something that holds up a flower.

OH, HENRY! New Paulson-inspired profanity.

GOING GREEN: All the rage in banking! Getting free money from Uncle Sam.
