

Introduction

How to Build a Business and Sell It for Millions is a must-read for entrepreneurs looking to achieve the opportunity of a lifetime. Author Jack Garson provides 20 chapters on building your business and 20 chapters on selling it for millions.

When you're building a business, you face countless challenges, from keeping customers and employees happy to fending off competition to juggling your payables and cash reserves. Sometime, though, the biggest challenge is right there in the mirror. To the surprise of many entrepreneurs, they are often their own greatest enemy. In *How to Build a Business and Sell It for Millions*, Jack Garson addresses the challenges of growing your business. One of the most difficult to tackle and least understood is self-destructiveness. In Chapter 10, below, Jack delves into this complex issue as it relates to businesses.

Chapter 10

Overcoming Self-Destructiveness

We've all caused those embarrassing situations when we say the exact wrong thing precisely at the worst possible moment. You know the feeling, so cringe-inducing that your blood pressure spikes and you start sweating just by thinking about it. It happens to all of us on occasion; just ask anyone who has had a few too many drinks at a party. But if it occurs with regularity, especially when you're running your company, then you have a problem. It's called self-destructive behavior—and it's ruined everyone from the owner of the mom and pop pizza shop who refuses to get the proper permits to the chairman of the Fortune 50 company who buys six-thousand-dollar shower curtains on the company tab and ends up in jail.

We're all human, so we all have issues. But self-destructive behavior sinks businesses. Take, for example, one entrepreneur I worked with who had a case so extreme, he could teach Martha Stewart a few lessons. (After all, did the domestic diva really need to save money on insider-trading deals?) We'll call our guy Henry, Hank for short.

Even though Hank's business card identified him as a real estate broker, most people referred to him in less flattering terms. Maybe because he once announced—loudly—at an employee's wedding reception, "I've never seen an uglier wedding party." Then there was the time he bought booze for some of his underage workers, and helped them load it into their cars as they left work for the weekend. Let's not forget Hank's frequent outbursts at work. While none of them have sued (yet), he has strangled four different employees (and counting). Maybe Hank is just frustrated at his ability to fire his least productive workers—his sons and his wife, whom he never should have hired in the first place. The world might think Hank is a jerk, but in reality he's troubled and lost and doesn't know what to do about it. In the end, he lost his business.

It shouldn't take a Ph.D. to realize Hank is incredibly self-destructive. But while it's

easier to see this behavior in its most extreme forms, most business leaders fail—or refuse—to see it in themselves. If you need examples, just check the headlines. Self-destructive behavior explains why:

- A powerful U.S. Congressman sends career-ending instant messages to pages.
- Countless heads of publicly traded companies, each earning tens of millions of dollars a year, accept backdated stock options, or trade on insider information or outright loot their company.
- An NFL star is forced to give up millions—and the limelight—because he won't give up pot.

Tragically Len Bias died using drugs just after being picked second overall in the first round of the 1986 NBA draft. U.S. Presidents have lost or jeopardized their enormous power for petty crimes and misdemeanors. And our countries minimum-security prisons are filled with onetime executive superstars who allowed their self-destruction compulsions to rob them of everything. In every case, the culprit snatched defeat from the jaws of victory.

Self-destruction claims many victims, and it could be destroying—or severely hampering—you and your business. How can you tell? Take a look at these common symptoms and decide if any seem familiar.

- You're never able to go beyond a certain level of success.
- You consistently make mistakes that hurt your business, and worse yet, they're the exact same mistakes.
- Your good employees are quitting and you can't get rid of the bad ones.
- You engage in behavior or language at work that makes your employees and clients uncomfortable.
- You tell risqué jokes and not everyone laughs.
- You take risks you shouldn't, like breaking the law, which could have dire consequences for your company (and we're not talking about speeding on empty highways).
- You break your word to others, sometimes your solemn word—as in cheating on your spouse or business partner.
- You're jealous of—sometimes even paralyzed by—the success of others.
- You're unable to make key decisions.
- You're late for important meetings and you miss key deadlines.
- You drink away your problems.
- You frequently wonder "How did I get in this situation, again?"

The symptoms are evident in the way you operate your business. Do you constantly hire the wrong employees, or fail to effectively communicate with your team? Do you send your employees on wild goose chases, or take your eye off the ball of your primary business objectives? How well do you handle your budget? Ever been guilty of allocating

money on high-risk, low-reward ventures? Do you allow your emotions to cause you to spend cash on vindictive lawsuits instead of focusing on the future? Speaking of the future, do you really work for success and have a plan ready for setbacks? If you said 'yes' to many of these questions, then you're well aware how self-destructiveness undermines ambitions, careers, and companies.

When your problems consistently hurt your business—and your life—then you need help. I understand that admitting you have problems isn't easy. I know. I too have confronted issues that I had previously long ignored.

Here's the reality. People come to me for legal work and business strategy—but they bring their baggage with them. Their business concerns may fill the conversation, but their self-destructive behavior is a cloud that hangs over the room. It frustrates our game plan at every turn. This self-destructiveness is just another problem impacting their business goals, and we need to deal with it. I wouldn't be doing my job if I didn't bring it to my clients' attention. Now here's the problem. They don't believe or want to believe they have psychological problems or there is even something called "self-destructiveness." I have seen people lose the deal of a lifetime all due to self-inflicted wounds and point to every reason under the sun except to their own self-destructive behavior. The unfortunate reality is that most entrepreneurs perceive their psychological issues as they do Pandora's Box: a matter best left closed.

When I raise the subject, however delicately, some entrepreneurs are receptive, some must be tricked, and some only respond to a dire crisis.

It took Mark, one of my clients, the umpteenth loss of a valued employee to realize how dysfunctional his behavior was. "Jack, I'm through" Mark said, in a voice cracking with emotion. Normally reserved to a fault, he asked, "Why won't people work for me? Betty just quit. Paul just gave his notice. Neither of them have jobs to go to. They just say it's too stressful to work here. Without them, I don't think I can go on. I'm not sleeping. I'm not eating. Half the time I'm sitting at my desk getting nothing done. I'm ready to walk away, too."

"Mark," I asked, "what if we could change all that? What if I could show you things that would make your company more successful and more profitable?"

"Sign me up!" Mark chuckled, his first laugh in weeks. "What do I have to do?"

Even with his newfound enthusiasm, I have learned to introduce the solution slowly. Great change begins with small steps.

The solution is counseling, which I euphemistically refer to as "coaching", "consulting," "business counseling," or "counseling", depending on the trepidation of my clients. It's one thing to do it; it's another to tell them what we're doing or, worse yet, hit them over the head with it. Some are just too threatened and scared to admit they need a shrink. Many would rather self-destruct. So, most often, I introduce them to a qualified

“consultant” who, as part of our team, can help them address our concerns. I work with business psychologists because they’re trained in dealing with the issues entrepreneurs face. Just like sports psychologists know how to help golfers get over the “yips,” these specialists understand the pressures of the business world.

What causes people to be self-destructive, and how do we help? The experts I’ve worked with have explained that self-destructive behavior often is the product of a lack of self-worth that takes root very early in one’s life. At its core, this low self-esteem is caused by improper parenting and inappropriate behavior by important figures in our lives. Most likely, your parents and others did their best. But all too often, their best was hand-me-downs of poor parenting skills. Bottom line: we sabotage ourselves because we believe we don’t deserve success.

How do I help? With knowledgeable “consultants,” my clients and I begin the process of recognizing the problem. From there, we work on avoiding self-destructive behavior.

Later we delve deeper into why my clients generate self-destructive behavior in the first place. Ultimately, they replace their low self-esteem with a healthy self-image. Don’t get me wrong. I understand most people think this is mumbo jumbo. My own brother thinks “self-destructiveness” is a made up word. But I know it exists. All you have to do is open your eyes. I like to say people have an internal thermostat for success and happiness. They allow themselves to reach a certain level, but if they go over it, they’ll do something self-destructive to bring themselves back to their “setting.” The counseling process involves replacing pathological thinking that tells us “we’re bad” with the understanding that we are essentially good but we all have our problems and need to work on them. In short, as we progress, we reset the thermostat at increasingly higher levels. Each new setting brings progress. Clients start making better decisions, and their relationships improve both at work and at home.

For Dan, one of my clients, everyday was like riding a bucking horse. He was bruised and battered from being thrown on a regular basis. He had employees berating him for his inconsistent management, and had vital workers threatening to quit because the rotten apples were getting away with murder. On top of that, he had partners that failed to share in the responsibilities, when they weren’t undermining his leadership. If he hadn’t paid so much to buy in, he would have walked away. But there was one bright spot. He knew he needed help. He asked me for help. A breakthrough came when I was presenting a new employment manual to his staff. One of the rotten apples challenged me, offended by the concept of showing up for work on time. She asked why the employees should accept new rules that would take away their rights. But instead of being combative, I explained to her how the new rules would actually make her life easier—by balancing the workload more evenly. “It’s going to give, not take away,” I told her. “If everyone shows up on time and does their job, than no one has to do their own work and someone else’s too.”

Dan was struck by my confidence. He said “Jack, I want to be able to handle my employees like you do. I would have been angry when she asked that question. Instead you were calm and cool. What’s your secret?”

Dan began seeing a business shrink. The first baby steps involved rewarding good behavior at work and avoiding hiring bad employees. As his self-confidence increased, he began successfully addressing sensitive subjects, not just with his partners but at home and elsewhere. As he improved, his employees joined him. Many took him up on his offer to let them see the company shrink. But others fled, too threatened by what they might find out about themselves. That was also helpful, because it forced out the bad apples. To this day, the company owner continues with periodic counseling, as do many of his colleagues. Dissention has declined. The business is healthier and happier. Productivity and profits have increased.

Your issues are like splinters. You can leave them in or dig them out. Endless pain or an end to pain? Your choice.